

The House ON STILTS



R. H. HAZARD

The House on Stilts

A Novel

BY

R. H. HAZARD



Illustrations by

J. A. LEMON

G. W. DILLINGHAM COMPANY
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. IN THE CLUTCH OF THE SURF . . .	9
II. THE YELLOW QUEEN'S ORDERS . . .	12
III. THE DOG-MAN'S TEETH	39
IV. IN VODOOLAND	64
V. THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL LIES . . .	89
VI. AT THE DUELLING GROUND	116
VII. THE OTHER MAN IN THE CASE . .	127
VIII. VARNEY REAPPEARS	135
IX. THE BATTLE ON THE ROAD	149
X. THE YELLOW QUEEN STRIKES . . .	165
XI. THE HOUSE ON STILTS	184
XII. IN THE COPPER CAVERNS	199
XIII. IN DEFENSE OF THE MONASTERY .	214
XIV. FROM THE LIBRARY WINDOW . . .	231
XV. THE CAVE OF REPENTANCE	254
XVI. A NOCTURNAL ADVENTURE	274
XVII. THE DAY OF ATONEMENT	280
XVIII. FROM THE DOOR OF DOOM . . .	290
XIX. A PROPHECY FULFILLED	301
XX. THE CABINET STANDS UP	311
XXI. THE YELLOW QUEEN'S LAST JOKE .	330

ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
"Please tell me where I am, and who you are?" <i>Frontispiece</i>	14
The Dog-Man	39
"Are these the statues of your departed brethren?" . . .	206
"Light your damned fire and get it over with!" snarled Larry.	286

The House on Stilts

CHAPTER I

IN THE CLUTCH OF THE SURF

FOR half an hour we rowed the boat parallel to the black cliffs, looking in vain for a harbor.

The ill-fated *Foam*, which had brought us on the wild chase across the Gulf in pursuit of Varney, had disappeared soon after we had left her sinking hulk, and with her had gone the bodies of the four men of the crew, who had lost their lives in the explosion that had wrecked the yacht. Only Captain Billings and Engineer Hollis were left to escape, with Larry Sullivan and myself, toward the unknown land now looming, dark and forbidding, before us.

Discouraging as it was to lose our man just as we were about to overhaul him, it had given us some satisfaction to witness disaster also over-

take the tug, which we had been following for three days and nights. The last we had seen of Varney was when he rowed away from the *Belvedere* with his three companions and the two big leather bags, which, we knew, contained a million of securities—looted from the Planters' Savings Bank.

As Varney's small boat vanished in the swirl of waters, Larry shook his fist after it, and cried:

"He's got to land on that shore, and I'll have him inside of twenty-four hours."

"Then you'll get him out of Davy Jones' locker," exclaimed Captain Billings, "for I don't believe his boat will live to land."

"A crook that's bound to be hanged will never be drowned," retorted Larry.

Suddenly, the black walls of rock ahead parted, and revealed to us the entrance of a little bay, landlocked and palm fringed. A shelving beach sloped down from a crescent-shaped grove of trees, and, as we rowed in joyfully, the sun broke through the scudding clouds and bathed the scene in tropic glory.

But we had not counted on the breakers.

Billings and Hollis, who were at the oars, saw the danger, but too late. Although they struggled manfully to evade the rocks, we soon found our-

selves in the whirl of froth that beat over a sunken ledge. In another instant, the boat came down with terrific violence upon the submerged rock, poised shuddering in the air, and split in twain.

We were all hurled into the water, and, as I went down in the foam, I felt the sharp impact of stone against my outstretched hands. I seized the rock with the frenzy of despair, but another wave, of greater bulk, tore me from it and dragged me into the depths.

I remember striking out wildly with hands and feet. My eyes were blinded by a sudden glare of sunshine; I felt another rock within my grasp, clutched at it frantically, missed it, was caught up once more by the green fingers of the sea—and things went black and red as my head struck the reef.

CHAPTER II

THE YELLOW QUEEN'S ORDERS

WHEN I awoke, I was stretched upon the warm sand, and the sun was shining hotly on my face. I raised my hand, to shade my eyes, and, as I did so, uttered a moan of pain.

"You must have sprained that wrist," said a sweet voice above me. "Perhaps you had better try the other one."

This time, when I opened my eyes, it was to behold a vision in a blue-and-white bathing suit. The sun and the breeze playing hide and seek in her golden hair, made the prettiest picture I had ever seen; and I closed my eyes and opened them again, to make sure that I was awake. After blinking at her in this absurd manner for a moment, I exclaimed:

"Are you real?"

"Do you think I am stuffed with sawdust and wound up with a key?" she retorted.

"I'm afraid that you came out of the ocean and

will go back again," I said, ignoring her warning frown and flashing eyes. "Your face, framed in its halo of gold, is about the stunningest thing I ever saw. In fact, it's too pretty to be true, and I'm sure I'm dreaming."

"Then you'd better wake up!" she snapped. "When you come to your senses, you may follow the walk up to the consulate, where your friends will be found. I'm sure you will arrive there without any trouble, for your assurance will carry you any distance."

With that, the girl turned abruptly and hurried up the walk.

"Oh, please come back!" I cried, sitting upright and waving my hands wildly in appeal. "Please don't leave me here all alone. I may be attacked by wild beasts, or sharks, or something. Forgive me for what I said. I was temporarily out of my head, and didn't mean it at all."

"Oh, you didn't!" she blazed, pausing irresolutely in her flight.

"Of course I did," I hastened to correct myself. "That is to say, I did and I didn't. I did not intend to be impudent—indeed, I did not—but, you see, the fact is, you looked so sweet and—— I'll stop—really I will!" This last as she started to flee again.

At this point I struggled to my feet, but, to my chagrin, staggered unsteadily about the beach, and, but for her lending me a helping hand, would have fallen.

"Believe me," I exclaimed, in great embarrassment, "I did not take too much grog before I landed. I think I must be light-headed from the sea water I drank."

"Or from the pounding you got on the rocks," she said sympathetically. Then she added, as I still held her hand: "Don't you think you can stand alone now? If you cannot, you had better sit down again, and wait for the stretcher that your friends have gone to fetch."

"Of course I can," I replied, in confusion. "So that is why they deserted me? I was wondering that they left me."

"Too bad that you were left in such incompetent hands as mine," she flashed. "You are to be pitied."

"Yes, I am—because every time I speak I make a fool of myself," I cried. "Now, please forgive me again, and let us change the subject. Please tell me where I am, who you are, what happened to Varney, how I was rescued, and all about it."

"All at once, or in instalments?" she asked,

with a smile that showed two marvelous dimples.

"On the instalment plan, if you please," I said, "and I'll take it as a favor if you will tell me about yourself first. Just imagine that that big palm tree, there, is a mutual acquaintance. Mr. Palm begs to present to you John Smith, a reporter on the *World-Union*, of St. Louis, who, in company with Larry Sullivan, the best plainclothesman on the force, is in search of Joseph Varney, a crook of the first water."

"Delighted to make your acquaintance, Mr. Smith," laughed the girl. "'This is Miss Norelle Pierson,' continues Mr. Palm, 'the daughter of General Herbert W. Pierson, United States consul at Gabrielle.'"

"Gabrielle!" I cried, in dismay. "Surely, I cannot have landed upon that awful island."

"Why do you call our pretty island awful?" asked the girl. "Can you imagine any scene fairer than this? Did you ever behold more stately palms than those nodding toward the sunlit water, or more dreamy hills than those in the distance?"

"Gabrielle is a theatre of horrors, which I would not have visited for a fortune," I replied. "It is associated with the darkest page of my life. My father was murdered here."

"I am so sorry," she said simply. "I regret that

I was the means of reopening the wounds of grief."

"My father was a member of the Baxter expedition, which was lost here," I continued, my memory flying back a decade, and the old sorrow gripping my heart. "You probably remember the sad story."

"I knew it long before we came here to live," said Miss Pierson, "and, since our arrival, have heard it repeated by many tongues. Those who joined in the vain search for the explorers have told us. Somewhere over there in the green mountains"—she raised her arm and pointed toward the hazy peaks—"every vestige of the brave little party vanished. They could not have disappeared more completely had the earth opened and swallowed them."

"That may have happened," I said. "Some convulsion of the earth—some volcanic disturbance—may have overwhelmed them. The most generally accepted belief, however, was that they were murdered by the savage blacks of the interior."

"But there is always hope, so long as there is no proof of death," exclaimed the girl. "Who knows but that your coming was directed by Providence? Who knows but that you may find your father here?"

"Impossible," I replied. "It is quite beyond the realm of belief. But do not let me sadden you with my family tragedy. Allow me to escort you back to the consulate; and, on the way, if you will be so kind, enlighten me further as to my surroundings and yourself."

We took up our walk, side by side, along the shell-strewn beach.

"Can you tell me anything of Varney's whereabouts?" I asked. "He must have landed on the island, about half an hour before us. He had three companions with him, and carried two large satchels. Those satchels contained a million dollars' worth of negotiable securities. If you can give me a clue to his whereabouts you will be assisting justice and——"

"And will help a bright young newspaper man to claim a big reward," interrupted Miss Pierson, with mockery in her tone.

"Of course, both Larry and I hope to get a reward," I admitted, "but we should be here this very minute, just the same, if there wasn't a cent in prospect. Varney robbed an army of poor people. There's no telling how many unfortunate tradesmen went to the wall when the crash came, or how many suicides and robberies followed in the wake of his embezzlement. He is one of the

greatest villains unhung, and it is to right some of the wrongs that he has done that Larry and I have taken the journey. Varney is a dark-complexioned man, of about forty-five, and when last——”

“When last seen, was making away with the million dollars in one hand and the beautiful maiden in the other,” exclaimed Miss Pierson mischievously.

“Not exactly,” I replied. “As far as we were able to ascertain, there was no woman in the case, at all.”

“Then it is all the more remarkable—all the more mysterious,” cried Miss Pierson. “I take it that he is handsome, has large, eloquent eyes, and can sing adorably.”

“I do not know about that,” I replied. “But have you seen him? We are wasting precious time, if you will pardon me for saying so; but you know every minute counts, when you are chasing a fugitive.”

“Were the satchels made of leather?” she asked. “Of strong, durable, waterproof leather?”

“Of course!” I cried, with rising excitement. “Then you have seen him, sure enough.”

“And did Varney watch his companions—oh, so jealously!—lest they steal the precious satchels

when he wasn't looking?" she went on, her eyes fairly dancing with merriment.

"Of course, Varney guarded the loot," I cried impatiently. "Now, please tell me the direction in which they were going when you saw them last."

"And were they all armed to the teeth?"

"Yes—oh, yes!" I cried. "Tell me, before they get too far away. Every moment is worth a thousand dollars." I was boiling over with excitement, and, before I realized what I was doing, seized her arm.

"Well, then, just to satisfy your curiosity," she said finally, "I have not seen them at all, and you will do me a great favor to release my wrist. It must be black and blue, from your frantic grip."

I dropped her arm, and stammered a blundering apology.

"I suppose I ought to beg your forgiveness," she went on, "for trifling with your young newspaper affections. It was very unkind of me—indeed it was!—so to treat a stranger upon our shores; but I had no idea that you were so impressionable."

"I'm just a plain, unvarnished fool," I managed to blurt out. "You gave me only half what I deserved."

"I should not have treated a guest so shabbily," she continued, in tones that had lost all trace of sharpness. "So, if you will agree to forgive and forget, we'll hurry back to the house, and save your friends a useless trip with the stretcher."

We walked along the beach in the direction of an American flag, which was floating over the grove of palms; and for a time neither of us ventured to break the spell of silence which had fallen upon us. Finally, just as we turned to enter the grove, Miss Pierson pointed to the breakers, boiling at the entrance of the harbor.

"The waves of Toro Bay," she said, "did their best to keep you out. They always do the Yellow Queen's bidding."

"The Yellow Queen?" I echoed. "Who on earth is she? I thought that Gabrielle belonged to Spain. What has the Yellow Queen to do with the waves or with us?"

"More than you dream possible," replied Miss Pierson sombrely. "Spain claims the island, and manages to hold St. Croix, and two or three other towns upon the coast. But over there—where you see Mont Lazarre smoking his pipe—she holds absolute sway."

"And who are over there?" I asked.

"The Yellow Queen's people, and, farther to the west, the Dumb Monks."

"And the queen's people are——"

"Voodoos—blacks—savages—cannibals!" she replied, with a shudder. "They are as low in the human scale as the aboriginal African stock from which they sprang. Their queen is a woman who possesses strange powers; she controls the winds and the waves, the volcano, and the wild beasts of the jungle. She sent that storm to drive you away from the island, you know."

"But I do not know anything of the sort," I retorted. "Do not tell me that you believe any such stuff as that. It's a long time since we Americans burned our witches."

"I do believe a great deal of it, nevertheless," replied Miss Pierson, her face growing very grave indeed. "How can I help believing, after witnessing some of the awful things that woman has done. She is believed to have killed the last American consul—my father's predecessor."

"Horrible!" I cried. "Tell me more about her."

"Not now," she said. "Before you have been here long you will learn more about Joan of Lazzarre, as she calls herself, than you will care to know."

"And the other people that you mentioned—"

did I understand you to call them the Dumb Monks?"

"Yes; they are a sect of sun worshippers, who live in a great monastery, perched on upright timbers, high above the ground, against the face of a cliff. Most of the islanders call the monastery the House on Stilts.

"No one seems to know very much about the monks. Some believe them to be the survivors of the Aztecs; others believe them to be the descendants of the lost tribes of Israel. They worship the condor as a sacred bird, and all who join the order take the vow of eternal silence. It is even whispered that all who become members of the brotherhood submit to having their tongues torn out."

"That's cheerful!" I exclaimed. "One of these days I'll pay them a visit. Think what a splendid Sunday story a write-up of the monastery would make."

"If you will take my advice, you will find a safer subject for your Sunday story," said Miss Pierson. "Those who have attempted to pry into their secrets have invariably met mysterious ends; those who have gone to visit the House on Stilts have never returned."

"Strange that I never heard of them before," I

mused. "I thought I became letter perfect about Gabrielle, ten years ago; but I suppose that the monks, as well as the Yellow Queen, have come into public notice within the last few years?"

"The monks have been here for centuries," replied the girl, "but the Yellow Queen's reign has not been of more than seven or eight years."

After plunging through a belt of trees, we emerged upon a clearing, surrounded by a stout wire fence, and came in view of the consulate. It was a pretty cottage, of the two-story bungalow type, and reminded me of many homes I had seen in Florida and California.

As we approached the gate, four men emerged from the house and came toward us. In addition to Larry, Captain Billings, and Engineer Hollis, there was an elderly man, of tall and angular build, who, even at thirty yards distance, bore a startling resemblance to President Lincoln. Hollis carried over his shoulder a green window blind, which, I presumed, was to be used for my accommodation. The quartette espied us in a moment, and set up a shout.

"Sure, he's all right, all right!" cried Larry, rushing toward us, and lapsing into the Irish brogue which he often used when under stress of excitement. "General, you can go back to your

biscuits, for the boy doesn't need the stretcher, at all, at all."

Lincoln's likeness hurried down the walk, with outstretched hand. "Please do me the honor," he exclaimed, "of introducing me to your companion, that I may congratulate him upon his providential escape and welcome him to our humble abode."

"This is Mr. Smith," exclaimed Miss Pierson, not waiting for Larry to perform the ceremony. "Mr. Smith—my father. You see, daddy, he came to almost immediately after you left; and, of course, we had to get acquainted. Very luckily for the conventions, Mr. Palm was there to make the introduction in proper form; so, even mother can have no occasion for criticism."

"Mr. Palm?" echoed the consul, meanwhile shaking hands with me most vigorously. "Who on earth is Mr. Palm?"

"Mr. Cocanut Palm, down by the water's edge," continued Miss Pierson, with a mischievous laugh. The introductions had to be made in due form by some one; and, really, he was the only introducer in sight. But he was a pronounced success—wasn't he, Mr. Smith?"

"The grandest introducer I ever met in my life," I agreed warmly.

"I am afraid you are incorrigible," said the consul, beaming upon his beautiful daughter. "But, dear me!" he exclaimed. "This will never do. I must go back to my biscuits, or Mrs. Pierson will never forgive me."

With this, he hastened back toward the house, and we followed him, at a more leisurely pace.

Then it was that I noticed, for the first time, that my three shipmates had strangely altered their appearance since last I had seen them. Each was garbed in the long, black clothes of half a century ago; each was dressed like Lincoln. When they had arrived, dripping, from the sea, the consul had evidently outfitted them. The effect was decidedly antique.

A little, gray-haired lady appeared upon the porch as we ascended the steps.

"This is Mr. Smith, mother dear," said Miss Pierson, as we reached the top of the steps. "He had the narrowest escape of all, you know, and has come to join the Abraham Lincoln party."

"Let me congratulate you, sir," began Mrs. Pierson, in a high-pitched, though not unpleasant, voice. I am so glad that you escaped from that dreadful ocean. Anybody who ventures upon it and escapes with his life is to be felicitated, I am sure; and one who has been shipwrecked more

than most. Now, gentlemen, I do hope that you will make yourselves at home; and I trust, moreover, that you will forgive the general topsyturviness of things about the house. Céleste, our cook, has not returned; and goodness knows how the general is getting on with the biscuits. He is out in the kitchen, wrestling with the baking powder and cornstarch now."

"Not cornstarch, mother, dear!" corrected her daughter, with a laugh. "Who ever heard of cornstarch in biscuits?"

"Well, I'm sure I don't know," went on Mrs. Pierson plaintively. "You see, when I was a girl, I never so much as looked inside the kitchen. Now I almost wish that I had learned to do some sort of work; for the negroes nowadays are such an incompetent, trifling set—not at all to be compared with those we used to have before the war. I tell you, gentlemen, the times have sadly changed. When I was a young girl my mother would no sooner have allowed me to learn to cook than she would have allowed me to go out alone with a young gentleman. Now, I am sorry to say, girls do both, and nothing is thought or said of it."

"And they are none the worse for it," said Miss Pierson.

"And none the better," retorted her mother, with a toss of her head.

"I must agree with Mrs. Pierson," observed Larry, with a sly wink in my direction.

I was about to champion the daughter's cause, when she abruptly changed the subject.

"Don't you think, mother, it would be a good idea to find Mr. Smith something to wear?" she said. "You know he has not changed his clothes since his ducking."

"Oh, by all means. A thousand pardons, Mr. Smith!" cried the little lady, all of a flutter. "I wonder what you can think of me, and of my bringing up. You will forgive me, won't you? You know we have been so much disturbed lately, with all these mysterious Voodoo things going on about us, that it is really a wonder that I have retained my senses. Now, won't one of you gentlemen be good enough to take charge of Mr. Smith, and see that he finds a change of raiment?"

"I will," volunteered Larry, arising from his chair and leading the way.

"Oh, thank you so much!" exclaimed Mrs. Pierson. "You see, the general is right busy just now, with his hands in the baking powder and salt-petre, or he would show you the way himself."

"I suppose father is making gunpowder," said

Norelle, with a laugh, as we left the room.

"It might not be a bad idea if he did make a lot of gunpowder, for we may need it," said Larry, in my ear, as we ascended the stairs to the general's bedchamber. "If I'm not greatly mistaken, there's going to be need for all the arms and ammunition that we can scrape together, before long."

"What's all the trouble about, and what kind of trouble is it?" I asked, as Sullivan dived into the clothes closet and began tossing forth garments, as though he owned the establishment.

"I haven't figured it all out yet," replied Larry, as he brought out another suit of black. "But, as near as I can diagnose the case, this here Yellow Queen is at the bottom of all the trouble. For some reason or other, she has, apparently, got it in for us. She predicted a week ago that we were coming, and stirred up a storm on the sea to send us to Davy Jones' locker."

"Oh, say, now, you're joking!" I cried.

"It's likely to be a serious joke before we get through with it," replied Larry, very soberly. "After you talk with the Piersons a bit, you'll change your mind about the yellow lady. She's some punkins around these parts, let me tell you."

"But who is she, and why has she got it in for us?"

"Ask me something easier. Both questions too hard for the witness. She seems to be the whole thing on the island. The blacks worship her, and the whites have a very wholesome respect for her powers, which are not to be sneezed at. In some unaccountable way, you and I seem to have riled her majesty; and, if you'd believe the dear old lady downstairs, our lives are not worth more than four bits apiece."

"You don't really mean to say that we are in danger?" I asked, stopping abruptly, with one leg thrust into General Pierson's trousers. "Why, we never even saw the woman, or heard of her, before this day."

"I'm not worrying a little bit," replied Larry, with a hearty laugh at my evident consternation of spirit. "The Yellow Queen is evidently a pretty good weather prophet, and when she sees a storm coming or a volcanic eruption on the way, she hustles around and predicts them, and thereby gains a great reputation. As long as I've got my forty-fives with me, I'm not afraid of a whole island full of Voodooos."

"Still, the general's daughter, as sensible a girl as she seems to be, evidently takes a whole lot of

stock in the Voodoo queen's powers," I said.

"Oh, yes, I haven't a doubt of it," agreed Sullivan. "I never saw a woman yet, bright and intelligent and sensible as she might be on every other subject, that couldn't be scared stiff by a little Hindoo fakirism, or 'black art,' as the Voodoos serve it up. You'll probably see some tricks down here that will keep you guessing for a time; but, when you understand 'em, they're all simple enough. Now, Jack, whatever you do, don't worry. We'll not let all the Yellow Queens this side of Hades prevent us from getting Varney and taking him back home. All dressed? Then let's go down and see how the general is getting along with the biscuits."

When we reached the lower floor, General Pier-son was just emerging from the kitchen. His face was flushed and perspiring, and one hand was wrapped in a towel.

"The grandest biscuits you ever saw in all your days, mother," he cried. "Captain Billings is certainly a wonderful chef. He came to my rescue just at the crisis of my culinary career. I really don't know just what he did to make the pesky things rise, but rise 'em he did; and you'll all glory over the result."

"He merely left out the baking powder, that

was all," laughed the captain, who followed the general into the living room. "But honor to whom honor is due. Miss Pierson discovered that he hadn't used any risin'—I really had nothing to do with it. But I promise I'll go my share at the table."

"But what is the matter with your right hand, my dear?" cried Mrs. Pierson, on the verge of tears, as she noticed the towel tied around his wrist. "Oh, my dear, you have not hurt yourself! Tell me, you did not gash it with the biscuit cutter?"

"It is nothing—nothing at all," replied the general, with a wave of the bundled member. "You see, I poured off the water from the potatoes, and, in my hurry to prepare the meal, forgot all about steam being hot. But it's wrapped up in baking soda, and the sting is almost all gone—in fact, it's almost well now. But, come, we are wasting precious time. The fare, such as it is, awaits your pleasure. I trust you will forgive our failure to make more elaborate preparations for your entertainment. Although we were expecting you, our cook failed us at the psychological moment, and you, therefore, find us just a little bit disorganized in the culinary department."

"You say you expected us?" echoed Captain Billings, as we took seats at the table.

"The Yellow Queen said we would have strangers in the house, and I've got so I generally rely on what she says," replied the general.

"Tell us about her," I begged.

"If you do, I shall not eat a morsel," cried Mrs. Pierson petulantly. "I have heard so much about that terrible woman that I am now on the verge of nervous prostration. Still, my dear, perhaps it would be just as well to put them on their guard against her. In fact, I think it would be very inhospitable of you if you did not, general."

"She's a sort of prophetess in bronze, I believe," remarked Sullivan.

"She's almost everything," began our host. "She is a witch, a doctor, a preacher, a tax collector, and an executioner. She runs the volcano over there to suit her moods, brings on drouths when she is in a bad humor, and slaughters a few dozen of her black subjects to fetch back the rain. She poisons wells and sows crops of snakes about the villages that are not loyal to her. In fact, to make a long story short, and to use a slang expression, she is It on the Island of Gabrielle; and, if you want to keep out of trouble, let the Yellow Queen have her way. Perhaps the fact that Mr. Thomas, my immediate predecessor in the consulate, died by poison, supposed to have been

administered by the Yellow Queen's orders, gives me an unusually wholesome respect for the lady."

"I am surprised that Spain doesn't put a stop to her crimes," I exclaimed.

"After two Spanish governor-generals had met mysterious and painful deaths trying to do what you suggest, old Mother Spain gave it up as a bad job," continued the general. "The last one to go had sentenced her to the garrotte at noon of the very day he died. She was on the way to the prison yard, where the execution was to take place, when the proceedings were brought to an abrupt close by the announcement of the governor-general's sudden taking off.

"The orderly who went to his office, to notify him that Joan of Lizarre was awaiting his presence, to be garrotted, found the governor-general seated at his desk, stone dead. There were marks of fingers about his throat, and the physicians who were summoned declared that he had been strangled. Yet the guards, stationed at his door and beneath his window, had seen no one enter or depart.

"The commandant of the prison ordered the execution to be postponed until the following day, then changed his mind about killing the Yellow Queen, and allowed her to depart in freedom at

midnight. What happened between noon and midnight to cause him to take this action is not known. He succeeded the official who was strangled to death, and you may guess that he'd rather cut off both his hands than order her arrest."

"She's got 'em all pretty well bluffed, that's evident," commented Larry. "It's a good thing for the lady of color that she doesn't live where Old Tige Corrigan could get his hands on her. She wouldn't last long in any city with him acting as chief."

We all pronounced the dinner a distinct success. The biscuits were especially good; and the general, his daughter, and the captain all came in for their share of compliments.

"Well, it certainly does my heart good to look upon honest American faces again, after seeing nothing but black and yellow visages for weeks at a time," said the general, as he gallantly cut the meat upon his wife's plate and spread butter upon her yams. "You see," he continued, as though we had remarked the unusual attention, "I really can fix her food better than she can."

"Before the war," remarked the lady, in a plaintive tone, "my maid used to cut my meat and feed me. If I had only known what was in store for me, in these later years, I really believe I

would have learned to do more. As it is, I cannot even bake a potato or boil an egg. I assure you, ladies were ladies, before the war."

The sound of sobbing in the adjoining room interrupted the conversation at this point.

"What is that?" asked the general, laying aside his knife and fork.

"It is Céleste crying," said Norelle, arising and going through the door.

In another moment she returned, leading a good-looking young mulatto woman, who, in her turn, held the hand of a boy, four or five years old.

Both the woman and the child were crying bitterly. The youngster was visiting us with evident reluctance, for he struggled and held back with all his strength. When he was finally dragged well within the dining room, he plumped himself upon the floor, and sobbed louder than ever.

"What on earth is the matter?" demanded the general. "Stop that bellowing, Céleste, this very minute, and tell us what ails you."

The mulatto woman's only reply was another wail. She caught the child in her arms, and began kissing it fiercely, meanwhile sobbing an incoherent string of French and Spanish phrases.

"They are going to take the boy from her,"

explained Norelle, whose face, I now observed, was pale as death.

"Well, why not, if they treat him kindly?" asked Mrs. Pierson. "Céleste is really in no position to care for him properly, anyway."

"The Yellow Queen demands the boy!" continued Norelle, in a scarcely audible whisper.

There was that in her tone which filled me with terror, although I did not then realize the full tragic significance of the news she brought.

General Pierson arose from his chair. "Do you mean," he began, "that she wants the child for her infernal sacrificial rites—that she intends to kill it?"

"Yes!" cried the yellow mother, in Spanish. "They are to kill the Calf to-night, and they want my Alphonse. Oh, dear, good, kind General Americano, save my little baby! He is all I have. He is my breath of life; he is my world. If he dies, I die. He is my heart, my blood and soul, my precious angel. The queen says you take the strangers from the sea into your house, and from your house must come the blood to wash the sin away. If I do not bring him to the mountain to-night, they will come and get him, and kill you all. Oh, Holy Virgin, save my Alphonse!"

"Never mind, Céleste. There—there, girl!"

said the general soothingly. "She shall not get your boy. We will save him. The great flag of the United States is waving over him, and no power on land or sea shall take him away."

Céleste, unconvinced, shook her head, and pressed the child closer to her bosom.

"The queen made a prophecy," said Miss Pier-son. "She predicted that the strangers who came from the sea to live in the consulate would destroy the Island of Gabrielle. The blacks are considerably worked up over it, and are threatening trouble."

"Yes, they will come and kill you all, and eat my Alphonse, too; for the queen has ordered it done!" wailed the negro woman.

"Are they cannibals, too?" I asked, with a shudder.

"They are the lowest of human beasts, when they start on their orgies," answered the general. "But, by Jove, they must stop their horrors when they reach the United States consulate." He shook his fist as he spoke, and the old-time fire of battle blazed in his eyes. "Poor old Spain may not be able to put a stop to Voodooism," he continued, growing more angry as he went on, "but the United States will, and can, draw the line at human sacrifice in her domain. This spot is

American soil, and they who seek refuge here are protected by the star-spangled banner. I'll defend them from all the Yellow Queens and Voodoo doctors this side of perdition, if I have to spill every drop of blood in my veins!"

"I am with the general to the last ditch," cried Sullivan, arising at the opposite side of the table, and reaching his hand across the board.

The general clasped Larry's hand in a strong grip; and, as they stood thus, Captain Billings and I, who were facing each other, arose and gripped fists across the table, over the handclasp of the other two.

"Look!" cried Norelle, the fighting blood of her father showing red in her cheeks. "Look! It is the sign of the cross—the emblem of Christianity—and the doom of the Yellow Queen!"



THE DOG MAN.

CHAPTER III

THE DOG-MAN'S TEETH

BY DINT of questioning, we finally learned from the frightened woman that the Yellow Queen was to send for the boy at the rising of the moon. This would be about eleven o'clock. Céleste had every reason to believe that her son was to be taken to a temple of Voodooism in the mountains, and slaughtered as an offering to the fiendish gods worshipped by the savages.

Although she was a convert to Christianity, like many of the other negroes on the island, she thought it best to be on the safe side of the religious question; so, she had attended the meetings of the Voodoo doctors and other high priests of the Yellow Queen, which were held periodically in the interior. The Voodoos held out present physical punishment, as well as future torture, for backsliders; so, perhaps, it is not to be wondered at that the orders of the queen were often

more obediently followed than those of the priests.

"We shall have plenty of time to prepare for them," said General Pierson, with decision. "And I'll teach these people here, as I taught those savages down at Zanzibar, when I was consul there, that it isn't healthy to monkey with the Stars and Stripes.

"We'll hoodoo any of the black rascals that show up around here to-night," he continued; "but I do not believe they will dare make an open demand for the child. They'll probably sneak around and try to steal him from his mother. If they fail in that, they'll likely give it up."

"Yes, they will come for my Alphonse," sobbed the colored woman. "The Yellow Queen she say, 'Go get calf,' and him nigger with bark like dog and eyes like fire, him come. If he no get child, him dog-man come with thousand niggers, and house burn. So say Yellow Queen."

"I'll give your dog-man something to bark about, if he comes sneaking around here!" cried the general angrily. "What would the immortal Lincoln have done in such an emergency? He would have fought to the last ditch for that little yellow boy; and it shall never be said of Herbert W. Pierson that his resemblance to the martyred President was a resemblance in form alone. It's

about time this Yellow Queen was taught her lesson, anyway. I'd hate to kill any of the benighted creatures; but, if it comes to the sticking point, I'll send a regiment of them to Hades, before they shall have the boy."

"How are you fixed for ammunition?" asked Larry.

"We haven't quite enough to send an army into action," replied the general, "but I think we can scrape together enough to give any attacking party a real sensation. Now for action. Norelle, my dear, will you be good enough to run upstairs and get from my trunk what cartridges you can find? I think there are a hundred rounds or so in a pasteboard box in the top tray. I believe you'll also find some Winchester shells."

"We have some arms, but are rather shy on ammunition," said Larry. "I've a couple of guns, and so has Jack."

"I have a revolver that will do its share of execution," added Captain Billings.

"Not so badly off, gentlemen," cried the general enthusiastically. "It might also be a good idea if the ladies prepared some lint and bandages. I hardly think we will need any, but we must make all proper preparations before going into battle."

"Oh, my beloved husband!" cried Mrs. Pierson

hysterically, at the picture of carnage which the mention of lint and bandages conjured up in her mind's eye. "If you should be wounded, or killed, I should never forgive myself for allowing you to come to this dreadful place. I feel sure I am going to faint."

"If you faint, you will make me lose my nerve," quickly replied the general. "And if I lose that, the battle will go against us. So, for the sake of Norelle—for my sake, for all our sakes—brace up, my dear."

The good lady braced herself visibly, choked back a few sobs, and released her frantic clasp on her husband's neck. "I will be brave, for my hero's sake," she cried.

"You are my heroine," he declared, kissing her upon the forehead, in a fatherly sort of way. "I have a brilliant idea," he continued incongruously. "Norelle, where are those fireworks?"

"In the east bedroom," replied the girl, who came in at that moment, bearing several boxes of cartridges. "Don't you remember, they were put up there, with the box belonging to Doctor Strong, so they might be out of the way?"

"To be sure," agreed her father. "Now, Mr. Smith and Mr. Sullivan will probably be good enough to bring the box downstairs."

"Indeed, we will," cried Sullivan.

Miss Pierson piloted us upstairs to the room wherein the box was stored. "This is a sort of baggage room and storehouse combined," she explained, as she threw open the door and revealed an apartment crowded with a miscellaneous assortment of boxes, barrels, and packages.

"You see, there is no end to the number of things that are sent to American citizens down here in care of the consul," continued the young woman, as she waved her hand at the assortment. "If a shipper isn't just sure where his consignee is located, he sends the goods to the consulate, and expects the consul to hunt up the man. It makes no difference to the shipper whether the customer is within one mile or a thousand of the consulate.

"If a new patent-medicine concern starts business, and desires to reach out for foreign trade, the consul is the man expected to push the business along; if a long-lost child is sought by sorrowing parents, the consul must find him; if Bill Jones comes in on a trading ship, spends all his money, gets drunk, and misses his boat, the consul is called upon for the price of his ticket back to Duluth, Minnesota. If the consul doesn't fill the bill in all these particulars, and do it in a cheerful

tone of voice, charges are preferred against him at the state department, and he is likely to lose his job. Oh, I tell you what, there's nothing like being in the diplomatic service.

"You might take along a bottle of soothing sirup," continued Miss Pierson, pointing to a case marked "Glass." Then she added: "The box you are after is on top of the pile, over there, to the left."

Before we could reach the box she indicated, we had to move a large hardwood case, marked:

DOCTOR HOWARD STRONG,
Care American Consul, St. Croix, Gabrielle.

"You might fetch that box, too," commanded Miss Pierson. "We may need that, before the night is over."

"It looks as though it might be burglar proof," I said, examining its well-made, mortised lid, its stout hasp, and patent lock.

"I happen to have the key," said Norelle. "Doctor Strong has gone into the interior on some sort of a bug-hunting expedition. He expected to be gone several months, and, as he thought he might possibly need something in the case during his absence, he left the key at the consulate. Just

another one of the little duties of the consul, by the way."

"What's in the box?" I asked.

"Nothing that will make news," she retorted quickly.

"I beg pardon," I exclaimed. "Of course, it's none of my business."

"None whatever," she laughed; "but I don't mind saying that there are a few surgical instruments, a few boxes of pills, a few bones, and some bugs and beetles on cards. You may not know it, but Doctor Howard Strong is one of the most famous beetle hunters in the world. Why, he has discovered no less than eight new species, and every one of them bears the proud title of 'Strongibus,' or something like that, in the books."

"How interesting!" exclaimed Larry. "I suppose he wears green goggles and long hair, and runs about with a net at the end of a long pole."

"And puts salt in his tea, mustard in his coffee, and forgets to come in when it rains," I added.

"On the contrary," exclaimed Miss Pierson, flaring up, quite unnecessarily, I thought; "he is very much of an up-to-date young man. His hair is as short as yours; he does not wear glasses at all; he can shoot a quarter out of your fingers at

fifty paces, is a mighty good boxer, and stands six feet one inch in his stockings."

"I beg his pardon," I exclaimed, and forthwith decided that I did not like Doctor Strong. "He's altogether too vigorous for a bug hunter," I said to myself, and fell to wondering why she had defended him so warmly.

We carried the two boxes downstairs, and found the general, Billings, and Hollis engaged in oiling up the firearms. When placed in a row upon the table, the weapons made quite a formidable-looking arsenal.

"What are you going to do with Doctor Strong's case?" asked General Pierson.

"Nothing, at present," replied his daughter. "But I thought we might make use of one or two things it contains, if the worst comes to the worst."

"I think we'll find a few negro startlers in here," said the general, as he went at the box with a screw-driver. "I decided, before I came down here, that I'd give the natives a real, old-fashioned American Fourth of July. When I was in Zanzibar, I made excellent use of them upon several occasions."

It had grown dark, and as we all gathered around the general while he worked at the box,

we heard a low rumble, as of distant thunder, coming from the north.

"Hear him mountain!" cried Céleste, who was huddled in one corner of the room, hugging her child. "Him mountain speak for Yellow Queen."

"What mountain?" asked Billings.

"Mont Lazarre," replied the general. "During certain seasons of the year, it becomes semi-active; and, of course, this woman, who is pretty sharp, presses it into service as an additional bugbear, to strengthen her hold upon the blacks."

He had by this time removed the boards from the top of the box, and now began to take out the sawdust in which the fireworks were packed. "I hope you will forgive me, my dears," he said to his wife and daughter, "if I make a litter upon the floor. To-morrow, Céleste can sweep it up."

"No to-morrow come for Céleste!" sobbed the yellow woman, at mention of her name.

"Now, see here, Céleste," cried the general, turning on her sternly, "I want you to stop this blubbering and foolishness! If you keep up this sort of music, we'll begin to think we are in danger, sure enough. If you don't dry up, by golly, I'll take that boy of yours and hand him over the fence to the first dog-man that comes after him."

"Oh, general, you know you wouldn't do anything of the sort—you know you would not!" remonstrated his wife.

"See if I don't," snapped the consul, as he proceeded to open the small packages of fireworks and lay them on the table. "We've got to have military discipline here. I'll just declare martial law this minute, and the first one that whimpers I'll order thrown outside the breastworks by the provost guard."

The sobs in the corner ceased very suddenly, and the general chuckled.

"Here is a fine lot of Roman candles for you, Mr. Smith," he said, handing me half a dozen of the familiar tubes. "Also a few firecrackers and 'nigger chasers.' I wonder if the fellow who invented them ever had an idea that they'd be tested on the real article? Now, there are enough firearms to go round, of course, but, unless it is a matter of life and death, I must ask you not to use bullets. We don't want to shed human blood, unless it is absolutely necessary. We will, therefore, see what persuasion there is in the noise and light producers, first. Set them off, therefore, as accurately as you can, in the first bunch of blacks that appears with hostile intent."

"If you have no objections, father," said his

daughter, "I would like to secure the help of Captain Billings for a few minutes, before you take him out with the army of defense. I think I have a plan that will help the cause."

"I am yours to command," said the captain.

I should have preferred to enlist under Miss Pierson's orders; but, as the commander-in-chief had mapped out my work, I could see no excuse for volunteering. Even had I offered my services, the chances are that the young lady would have declined them with fine scorn.

Lanterns were found and lighted; the shutters and doors of the house were all securely fastened; and Mrs. Pierson, Céleste, and her boy were sent upstairs, for greater safety.

"As soon as you can, you will join your mother, on the second floor," said the general to Norelle. "Lock yourselves in securely; and, if you need help, fire this revolver out of the window. As soon as you can spare the captain, we need him in the yard. Come on, now, my comrades; we will see what measures we can take to repel the enemy."

The general handed his daughter one of the revolvers, saw the other women ascend the stairs, and then led us out into the darkness. "Remember," he continued, his voice taking on an imperi-

ous ring, as though he were again at the head of his old command, "it is very important that we keep the sneaking wretches away from the house. If they get near enough to touch a match, they'll fire it, sure as fate, for if there's one kind of deviltry they like more than another, it is arson."

He led the way down the path, his swinging lantern causing the shadows of his legs to make giant strides against the grove of palms.

"Don't you think it would be a good idea to put out that light?" asked Larry. "We are making the finest kind of targets, this very minute."

"There's no danger," replied the general. "In the first place, they will not come before moonrise, and that's half an hour from now. In the second, they'll make no attack until after a formal demand for the child.

"There are two probable points of attack," he continued, as we reached the fence that bounded the consulate grounds on the north, or landward side. "This is one of them. Along here, you see, runs the road from St. Croix to the sugar plantations, west of us. The western boundary of the grounds is pretty well protected by the jungle. The other likely point for them to strike is on the eastern side of the reservation, where the road from Mont Lazarre terminates. Of course, if

they wished, they could approach and attack from the brush; but it would not be easy going for a crowd. Again, they might attack from the sea. The Carib negro, however, is not a good sailor, especially that variety which works the plantations and follows the *Yellow Queen*."

The general held his lantern at arm's length, to throw its rays down the green aisle which formed the road to St. Croix. Not a breath of air stirred the leaves of the palms and the palmettos drooping over the path; and only the incessant gleam of the fireflies, and the low hum of insects, gave token of life in the neighborhood.

"We will leave you on guard here, Smith," said General Pierson, after we had surveyed the approach for a minute. "Don't use your revolver unless you get into a tight place, for we wish to avoid international complications, if possible. If you think your life is in danger, however, do not hesitate for a minute, but turn loose any and all of the ammunition you have about you.

"I'll place Sullivan at the dangerous eastern fence, and Hollis at the west. I'll divide my own energies between the various places, and when the captain comes from the house, will place him where he can be most useful. I think that, with this disposal of our forces, we can give a good

account of ourselves; and if the negroes do succeed in breaking into the consulate, they will know they have been in a fight, anyway."

He started away with the others, then came back, to add: "If they attack in any numbers, send up a rocket or fire off your revolver, to notify us. Should you hear a shot in the direction of any of the other outposts, follow the path back to the consulate, and then to the threatened point, as fast as possible, to lend a hand. Whatever you do, don't lose your nerve. Remember, you are fighting for the ladies and the flag, as well as for that little black boy up there. If they do attack, and their onslaught were to be successful, you may imagine the result."

"For the flag!" I exclaimed fervently, adding, under my breath: "And for Norelle."

The consul and his companions moved away in the darkness, and, as the dancing rays of the lantern grew fainter and fainter, to flash themselves out, at last, in the distant shrubbery, I became oppressed with an overpowering sense of loneliness. I seemed to be in a vast wilderness, miles and miles from human habitation. In the stillness, I could hear the throbbing of my own heart, and the moments dragged until they seemed hours.

As I waited, and grew more accustomed to the quiet of the night, I began to distinguish other sounds. The jungle thicket seemed to be filled with a whispering multitude. The beetles and bugs were all very much awake; and now and then, far off up the mountain slope, I could hear the hoot of an owl. The mournful beating of the surf on the ledge at the entrance of Toro Bay, where we had so nearly ended our lives, added weirdness to the spell; and, in spite of the mosquito stings, and the realization of the danger that threatened, I seemed about to be thrown into a hypnotic trance.

Perhaps it was the flashing of the fireflies, which seemed, to my overwrought imagination, to be the red eyes of Voodoo doctors, circling round me in a crazy dance.

Something soft and velvety struck me a blow on the right cheek.

I dropped my fireworks, and struck out blindly at the thing.

I tried to shout for help, but fear gripped my throat. I would have fainted, I think, then and there, had not another blow, this time on the forehead, and the flutter of wings above my head, told me that my unseen enemy was a bat.

"A vampire!" I exclaimed, hugely relieved, but

still shuddering. "Perhaps it is as badly scared as I am."

It is no pleasant job to stand in the dark, on strange ground, and await the attack of an unknown foe. The rustling of leaves sounds like the low-breathed consultations of hidden conspirators; the lapping of the waves, down on the beach, like the patter of feet hurrying to the attack. An uneasiness, born of the nervous strain, takes possession of you after a while, and you feel that you must shout aloud. I longed to send up one of the rockets or to fire off a Roman candle—to do anything to end the horrible suspense.

An owl croaked down the road. The note was answered by a hoot, hollow and loud, not thirty feet to my left. I felt, rather than heard, the presence of a multitude of human beings, somewhere beyond the wire fence. I could then distinguish the padding of bare feet and the heavy breathing of a score of lungs.

"The Yellow Queen's people, at last," I said to myself; and, as I became convinced that I had to deal with tangible, flesh-and-blood opponents, much of that nameless dread, which had clutched my heart, deserted me and I began to tingle with the eager excitement of battle which

flows, unheeded, in all our Anglo-Saxon veins.

A voice spoke in the dark:

"The Yellow Queen has sent for her own. The woman in the house of the American will bring the child to the mountain. The moon is about to rise. The Calf must be killed. The Blood must run. The Spirit of Father Mountain commands."

I answered the voice:

"Go tell the Yellow Queen she cannot have the boy, for he is under the protection of the American flag, and the great nation of the north will not give him up. If the Yellow Queen wants blood, let her kill a calf in the field."

"The Yellow Queen must be obeyed," said the voice. "She will have the boy, and those who try to keep him from her will be killed. The island will run red with blood, and the American strangers will die."

"The American flag is striped with red," I cried. "It is red from the blood of those who have died to defend it and those who have died while trying in vain, to tear it down. Let the Yellow Queen beware the fate of those who have failed."

"Joan of Lazzarre never fails. If you will not give the boy to her messengers, she will send the man with eyes of fire and bark like dog. He never returns empty-handed."

"Send on your dog-man," I shouted, "and we will shoot him as we do mad dogs in the north."

A rush of bare feet upon the path, a babel of strange tongues shouting unintelligible cries, a clashing of steel weapons, all warned me that the time for action had come.

With nervous haste, I applied the glowing end of my cigar to three of the rockets, which I had previously placed horizontally upon the top of one of the fence posts, and stepped aside as I did so, to avoid the back fire. My heart sank to see one of the three sputtering fuses die and disappear. The pattering of bare feet was now within a rod of the barrier.

Two hissing streams of fire leaped from the fence to meet them. As the rockets sped into the darkness, cutting a pathway of light through the tropic foliage, my enemies were revealed.

There were fifty or more of them—big, black fellows, armed with machetes, old-fashioned guns, and murderous-looking knives with crooked blades.

One of the rockets shot harmlessly over their heads, and lost itself in the tangle of leaves and vines beyond. But the other plowed into the middle of the attacking party; and, as it struck, a

chorus of fierce screams awoke the echoes of the forest, and set the night fowl and monkeys to screeching in wild, unearthly chorus.

Hastily lighting a bunch of firecrackers, I threw them into the mob of yelling blacks.

As the fiery snappers landed in the midst of the throng and began to spit flame and smoke, all the fight that was in them left the queen's followers. Many were hopping up and down, in an agony of pain; others were frantically fighting the flames which had been kindled about their garments; still others—the majority of them—started back along the pathway to the village, as fast as their legs would carry them.

I lit a Roman candle, and stood in the midst of a shower of sparks, whirling the stick. In a moment, I realized the unwisdom of the move, for one of the blacks, less frightened than the rest, availed himself of the fine mark I presented, and aimed his musket at my head.

Before he could pull the trigger, however, the first ball of fire burst from the candle's end, and, by the sheerest luck, caught him under the chin. His musket went off in the air as he turned a complete somersault, and when he picked himself up, he ran away, howling like a dervish.

"Obeah, obeah!" cried the retreating negroes.

Five or six more balls of fire from the Roman candles followed them, as they fled down the road, and lit the pathway for them. Many of the blacks continued to utter howls of pain long after the patter of their feet had died away in the distance.

"Obeah, obeah, obeah!" came faintly back from the direction of the village.

General Pierson, Sullivan, and Captain Billings came running up.

"Where are the black rascals?" asked the general, as he joined me. "We heard a shot down here, and came along as fast as we could."

"They seem to have had business elsewhere," I replied.

"What did they do? What direction did they take? How many of them were there?" asked the general, all in a breath.

"I don't know where they've gone," I said, lighting a fresh cigar to steady my nerves.

"But didn't you see them?" asked Larry.

"Got a pretty good view of about fifty of them, when the rockets went off and the Roman candle hit 'em."

"Then you've had a battle down here," cried the general, boiling over with excitement. "Why,

you young scoundrel, you must have put them to rout single-handed."

"After the last Roman candle ball landed in their midst," I said, "I don't think there was much fight left in them. The firecrackers helped a little, too." And, as I recollected the fire dance given by the poor wretches, I burst into a half-hysterical laugh.

"By gad, sir, I congratulate you!" cried General Pierson, groping for my hand in the dark. "You are a credit to the flag, and, if my appropriation was large enough, I'd appoint you vice consul."

"Obeah, obeah, obeah!"

As the general ceased speaking, the weird cry of the negroes sounded again from the far depths of the woods. The words were echoed and reëchoed from the distant mountain; and, suddenly, a light, unearthly pale and green, illumined our faces. As I looked into the ghastly countenances of my friends, a rattling, as of dry bones, disturbed the silence of the night.

I turned fearfully around, to see the source of the strange light, and beheld, high in air over the tops of the palms, a livid skeleton, dancing in space. It waved its arms, kicked its bony legs, and opened and shut its fleshless jaws. The flickering light paled slowly, as we gazed, and, finally,

went out. But the rattle of bones continued in the dark.

"What unearthly trick is that?" I asked. "Can the Yellow Queen cause skeletons to dance in the sky?"

"Our little white queen can," replied the general, with a laugh. "That, I think, is Norelle's vaudeville act. Those anatomical specimens of Doctor Strong came in handy to-night. But, come—let us return to the house. The women folks are probably in a state of nerves by this time."

"By the way," I asked, as we walked up the path, "what does 'obeah' mean?"

"Most anything the negroes cannot understand—witchcraft, sorcery, Voodooism, for instance," replied the general. "When anything is obeah, it's charmed. A piece of good luck is obeah; so is a run of bad luck. An automobile, a telephone, the telegraph, all are obeah to the Carib negro. Students of African folk lore tell us that the word comes from *obi*, which is the word for snake in several of the dialects. Obeah is the most convenient word imaginable. It fits anything and everything."

"What was that?" asked Sullivan. "I thought I heard a woman scream."

"Some parrot or monkey in the woods, I guess," suggested the general.

We listened for a moment, and then all started on a dead run for the house; for now we all heard it—a long, despairing wail. Following closely upon the woman's cry was the short, sharp bark of a large dog.

We dashed up the steps, and ran plump into the arms of Captain Billings, who was about to leave the house. Mrs. Pierson was seated in a chair in the hall, wringing her hands and sobbing hysterically.

"What's up?" demanded the general, striding in. "What on earth is the trouble?"

Another deluge of tears from Mrs. Pierson.

"But the danger is over," exclaimed the general. "The negroes have all gone. Young Smith fired a few rockets and things into their faces, and they are running yet. You need have no fear, my dear, that they will come back."

"Why should they come back?" wailed Mrs. Pierson. "They got what they came for."

"What do you mean?" demanded her husband.

"The child—they got him right under our very noses!" sobbed Mrs. Pierson. "But how they managed to do it is more than I can tell. They are now taking him up to the mountain, to kill

him. Oh, why did we ever, ever come to this horrible island?"

"There, there!" soothed the general, advancing and placing his arm about her. "The boy isn't dead yet—not by a long sight. Where is Céleste?"

"Upstairs, where you told her to go," replied Mrs. Pierson, a little more calmly. "This is the way it happened, so far as we know: She had locked herself up in the back room with the boy. I was in the next room, and Norelle and the captain were on the roof, fixing up the skeleton. Then Céleste screamed, and, with the scream, I distinctly heard the barking of a large dog, although I am positive no animal could have gained entrance to the room. I called to Céleste to admit me, but she did not answer. When the captain came downstairs, I got him to break into the room, and found Céleste on the floor in a faint, and the boy missing."

"The outside window of that room is twenty feet from the ground," exclaimed General Pierson. "That beats me. Let us see the woman." He led the way upstairs, and we followed.

The colored woman was still prostrate upon the floor, but had recovered from her faint, and was weeping convulsively.

"What's the matter, Céleste?" demanded the general.

"My Alphonse is gone!" cried the woman.

"Who took him?"

"Him nigger with eyes of fire and bark like dog."

"Oh, nonsense!" cried General Pierson impatiently. "There hasn't a soul entered this place since we left it. Your youngster is larking about the house somewhere. You've just gone to sleep and dreamed that he was stolen."

"Did Céleste dream that dog-man bite her arm, like this, when she held Alphonse from him?" As she spoke, she bared her right arm to the shoulder.

"Her arm is bleeding!" cried Larry.

There was a lacerated wound, fully three inches long, in the brown flesh above the elbow.

CHAPTER IV

IN VOODOOLAND

DILIGENT search of the house and grounds failed to reveal any trace of the missing child. The broken leaves of a huge vine, growing up the side of the house and past the window of the room from which the boy was abducted, offered a very plausible explanation of the dog man's entry and exit.

Larry Sullivan solved the riddle. Standing beneath the window, he grasped the vine, and climbed hand over hand to the sill, to prove the strength of the ladder used by the queen's uncanny messenger.

"If there's nothing more spooky about the boy's disappearance than that," exclaimed Larry, "I'm willing to try to get him back. All we've got to do is to follow the negroes to the meeting place, and take him."

"And be murdered and offered up as a sacrifice, for your pains," cried Miss Pierson.

"It would be almost certain death," said the general.

"Oh, save my Alphonse, my precious Alphonse!" cried Céleste, who had been wandering, weeping, around the grounds.

"It does seem a shame to have the little rascal chopped up and eaten by those heathens," continued Sullivan, "and I'm convinced we could save him, if we started early enough. How far is it to the place where you black devils meet?" he demanded, turning to Céleste.

"Six—seven miles," replied the woman. "I take you. I know way. But you need big, whole army, or Yellow Queen kill you sure."

"All we need is a little nerve, some giant powder, and two or three short pieces of gas pipe," said Larry briskly, his mind evidently made up.

"Oh, you surely are not thinking seriously of going?" cried Mrs. Pierson.

"I sure am thinking of it," exclaimed Larry. "I suppose we'll have to move quick, won't we? What time do they usually kill off their—their calves?"

"When the moon is right—so—up," explained Céleste, pointing to the zenith.

"Then we've got about three hours, I judge," said Sullivan. Turning to the general, he asked:

"Is there any dynamite or blasting powder within easy reach? I'd like to play anarchist to-night, but can't, unless I have some bombs."

"Not a grain this side of St. Croix, and the stores there are, of course, closed at this time of night," replied the general.

"How would some nitroglycerine do?" asked Miss Pierson.

"Fine, if we could get it," replied Larry, with enthusiasm.

"I think I can find about a dozen cans," said the girl.

"If you mean that which belonged to the Del Oro Company," said the general, "that was all thrown into the sea."

"Yes," assented Norelle. "It was dropped into the sea, but I took the precaution of tying a string to it, and think it can be fished out without the least bit of danger. I thought it might come in handy some time."

"I am inclined to think that the eloquent eyes of young Herbert had something to do with your saving that stuff," bantered the general. "However, I'm right glad you saved it."

Miss Pierson led the way down to the beach, to a point where the explosives had been submerged. Larry, the general, and I followed in her footsteps.

"You see," explained the general, as we proceeded down the shadowy pathway, "that nitroglycerine was sent here by Charlie Herbert, manager of the Del Oro Mining Company, which, you may remember, went up the financial spout a little while ago."

"Of course, there is no gold in Gabrielle," I ventured. "The island, being of volcanic origin, probably has no gold-bearing quartz."

"Wrong—like a great many other eminent authorities," said the general. "Whether it is quartz of the right kind or not, the Del Oro people struck a mother lode of marvelous richness. Ore assaying three thousand dollars to the ton was taken out, and there was, apparently, no end to the deposit. Herbert and his backers had every prospect of becoming millionaires within a few months, and were going ahead swimmingly, when they had to quit."

"Who made them quit?"

"The Yellow Queen. She sent Herbert and his men back to the States on the double-quick. It was go home or die, with them; so they went home."

"But why did she object to their mining operations?"

"She was wise enough to know that, if it became

noised about the world that gold was here, the whites would flock to Gabrielle by the thousands. It would be another Klondike. Voodooism would be wiped out, and the reign of the Yellow Queen would be at an end. Voodooism doesn't flourish in a white man's country. It needs the superstitious soil of a black man's brain to grow upon."

By this time, we had reached a point upon the beach some two hundred yards east of the reef where our small boat had come to disaster. The sea was like a mirror, and the rising moon, now lifted well above the edge of the Caribbean, shone so brightly on the pebbles and shells that you could have counted them one by one.

Miss Pierson proceeded to a spot where a venerable palm, bent with the weight of years, leaned, at an angle of forty-five degrees, over the surface of the water. Before we reached the tree we could see a line stretching from the trunk out into the bay. Norelle laid hold of the line, and began hauling it in, hand over hand.

"If you don't mind," exclaimed Sullivan, taking the rope from her hands rather unceremoniously, "I'll just take charge of this fish myself. I don't like the way you are jerking it in. If it should strike a stone, at the rate you were hauling it, there'd be an explosion and a tidal wave that

would swamp the consulate; and our little crowd here would be up in the vicinity of the Milky Way."

Sullivan brought the cans to shore in a gingerly manner, selected one from the bag which held them, and laid it carefully upon the sand. Then he replaced the others in the bag, and, wading out into the water, sunk the death-dealing canisters from view.

"It won't take ten minutes to prepare our little torpedoes," he said, as we hurried back toward the house. "And another thing we need," he added, "is some make-up."

"What do you want make-up for?" asked the general.

"I'm going to do a black-face turn. What do you think of me as a successor to the late lamented Haverley? To do the act right, I'll have to organize a troupe. Jack, are you going to take part in the opening performance?"

"I received orders to follow you wherever you went," I replied; "so start the show, Mr. Interlocutor."

"Of course you'll have to black up, if you go after that poor little boy," said Norelle. "How stupid of me not to think of that at first!"

"I suppose a white man wouldn't get very far

in the direction of that Voodoo show," said General Pierson. "I only pray they will not detect your masquerade. Boys, take my advice and give up this theatrical affair; for that is what it is, pure and simple. It sounds heroic, and all that, to try to rescue that child from the hands of its savage executioners; but you'll find that planning the expedition, and going through with it successfully, are altogether different propositions. The chances are ten to one that you'll be killed in the attempt, and you haven't one chance in one hundred of getting the boy back alive."

"I'll take that chance," protested Larry warmly. "Sure, I'd never be able to sleep soundly again if I didn't. Every time I waked up in the night, I'd see that kid's face and hear his mother's cry."

"That's the way I like to hear a man talk," cried Norelle. "I only wish I wore trousers. If I did, I'd go with you."

"Well, I'm wearing a pair that's going to follow Sullivan," I cried, fired with enthusiasm. With her eyes upon me, I felt that I could overcome all the Voodoos in the tropics.

"That's the way I feel about it, too," said Captain Billings, who was waiting for us at the foot of the steps. "I'm anxious to go, and if it is necessary, I'd just as soon kill a dozen Yellow

Queens, before I'd let them cut up that child and make soup of his bones."

"I think it will be wiser for some of the party to remain here to guard the consulate," said Sullivan. "If Smith and I can't do it, a dozen would fail. If we went in force, we would probably attract attention, and would be almost certain to spoil the whole thing. No matter how many of our party we took along, we could not gather enough to overcome the mob we will find on the mountain. We must work the affair as a surprise, and get away before they wake up."

"There's a good deal of sense in that argument," observed the general. "If Mr. Sullivan is determined to undertake the perilous expedition, it is better that he go about it in the manner that suits him best. The captain, Mr. Hollis, and I will remain and act as the defenders of the home and the flag."

Mrs. Pierson and the sobbing Céleste entered the hall as we were speaking.

"Oh, do not leave us!" cried Mrs. Pierson tragically. "You have defended us so nobly till now; please do not leave us to the mercy of the savages."

"I am still here, Mrs. Pierson," cried the gen-

eral, drawing himself up to his full height, and folding his arms.

"Of course, dear, you are always my very bravest soldier," his wife hastened to say, while Norelle and the rest of us laughed, in spite of the gravity of the situation. "But you know," she continued, "in union there is strength, and we need all the strength we can get just now. There is no telling how soon those dreadful negroes will come back again."

"There isn't much danger of their coming this night," said General Pierson. "They have their ceremony on the mountain to pull off, and, after that is over, they'll not be in a condition to do much of anything."

"Why not?" I asked.

"They'll all be drunk. These Voodoo soirées usually wind up in a free-for-all debauch. They'll consume enough alcohol and rum to float the State of Missouri, between now and sun-up."

Larry, in the meantime, had adjourned to the kitchen, where we could see him bending over the table, his head in very close proximity to the deadly canister of nitroglycerine.

"Any danger of that stuff going off, out there?" asked General Pierson. "Perhaps we had better all adjourn to the garden."

"None in the world, for I've got it all safely dampened, except a little bit I'm saving for my detonator," replied Sullivan. "Don't worry about this part of the job, for I've made bombs before. Jack, while you are about it, why don't you hunt up some stuff for your make-up, and put it on?"

"I'll make him up—if he'll let me," volunteered Norelle.

"Will I? Well, I guess I will," I hastened to say, and was tempted to add that nothing would give me more pleasure than to have her make me up daily through life.

In less time than it takes to tell it, she had found three or four corks, had burned them over a candle, had scraped off the charcoal thus formed, and had mixed it with some cold cream, to form a paste. The result, when applied to my countenance, was certainly a pronounced success, if lustre and blackness counted at all. I do not think the Island of Gabrielle ever harbored quite as black a man as I was, when Miss Pierson finished her task. Then Sullivan's face received similar treatment, and we were ready to sally forth.

"Your hands look pretty white, Mr. Sullivan," said Norelle. "Don't you think you'd better have them treated, too?"

"No; but if you have any of your father's old gloves lying around, we'll borrow them," said Larry.

The girl knew exactly where to find the articles required, and soon we had each donned a pair.

"All aboard for Voodooland!" cried Sullivan. "Come on, now, you, whatever your name is. Stop crying, and step lively." This to Céleste, who was whimpering at the door.

"I'se ready," sobbed the woman. "But I'se ready to die, too. The Yellow Queen she get us all. But I no want live if my Alphonse die."

"Well, it's a sure thing he'll be killed, unless you hurry mighty fast," exclaimed Sullivan. "We've got to beat that moon to the top of the mountain."

"Shake hands all around before you go," said the general, his voice trembling a little. "Remember that we Americans are few and far between down here in Gabrielle. God grant that the number be not diminished this night."

"Have no fears for us," replied Larry cheerfully, gripping hands with the consul, and then with Mrs. Pierson and Norelle. "We'll do our best, and if we don't bring back the boy, we'll have a mighty good excuse."

"We will pray for you," said Mrs. Pierson. "I

think you are both brave and grand to do it." She curtsied over my hand, and I bowed low over hers.

"This reminds me of the good old days of the Revolution, the minuet, and the snuffbox," said Norelle, with a laugh. "Really, Mr. Smith should have lived in our great-grandfathers' time. He would have made a splendid dancing master."

"This is no time for levity, my child," reproved Mrs. Pierson. "Do you realize, Norelle, that these two brave young men are starting upon a noble, self-sacrificing mission, which may lead them to their death?"

"Indeed, I do," replied the girl. "They will forgive me, I hope, for appearing to make light of the expedition. But they know that smiles are often mere cheerful masks, to hide the tears we want to shed."

She placed her hand in mine as she spoke; and, looking into her eyes, I could see that her tears were perilously near the brink.

"The moon is climbing mighty fast," urged Sullivan; and I realized that I was holding Norelle's hand longer than the occasion warranted. So, reluctantly, I released it, and mumbling something about "duty to humanity," which sounded

very flat, hurried out of the door. Céleste walked between us.

Just before leaving the consulate grounds, Larry paused, and handed me two cylindrical objects, which might have weighed a couple of pounds apiece.

"Take this junk," he said, "and be mighty darned careful with it. If you drop either one of them, you are a dead man, and we will follow you into the beyond."

"But what shall I do with them?" I asked, nervously clutching the bombs, my hair fairly standing on end at the thought of letting them fall.

"When we get ready for our part of the show, fire them against a rock, or a tree, or a negro's head—against anything hard. They will do the rest. I have a couple more just like yours; and with four first-class blow-ups at our command we ought to make things interesting for our friends in Voodooville."

As we hurried along the lane of palms and reached the rising ground of the foothills, Larry chuckled aloud.

"Seems to me this is pretty serious business," I said. "I, for one, do not see anything to laugh about."

"I was just thinking how near Voodooville is like vaudeville," he said. "I wonder if you couldn't work that into a sketch for stage use—the Voodoos of Vaudeville—or something of the sort."

"I don't feel a bit like writing stage stuff now," I retorted. "But, s-sh! Here comes a crowd of blacks."

As I spoke, a dozen negro men and women stalked silently out of a side path, and turned northward, in the direction of the smoking mountain. At first, they walked fifty yards or so ahead of us, and four abreast; but as the pathway narrowed and steepened, they strung out in Indian file. Soon we three were compelled to follow their example, and Sullivan took the lead, Céleste followed, and I brought up the rear.

Before we had proceeded far, we heard a shuffling of feet behind, and, looking back, saw a troupe of shadowy forms following in our wake.

The traveling soon became more difficult, for the pathway resolved itself into the crudest kind of a trail, and jagged rocks, fallen trees, and and trailing, twisting vines opposed our progress. The sky, which earlier in the evening had been ablaze with lunar and stellar light, became overcast with scudding clouds, and the wind came in from the sea, to sob hysterically in the treetops.

A flaming light burst above us; then another, and another. Instinctively, I gripped the handles of my revolvers, but, in another moment, dropped them, when I saw that the lights were only torches lit by those ahead to guide them on their upward way. In a few minutes, I counted eight lights above us; and, looking backward and downward, was amazed to see twice that number in our rear.

The torches revealed a procession of blacks, which wound and twisted its way down the hill for a mile, until the flickering lights grew as small as the restless lamps of the fireflies. Where they all came from, and when they had joined us, were equal mysteries; but there they came, toiling, sweating, panting up the long hill, to join in the ghastly ceremony of murdering a child. Shadowy and unreal they looked, like a procession of black demons from the pit; but every torch flare caught the glister of steel, to tell us that the followers of the Yellow Queen came armed.

*"Papaloi and Mamanloi go to the mountain;
White calf's blood run like a fountain."*

A huge negro torchbearer, only a few feet ahead of us, burst into this piece of doggerel, his

heavy tones sounding hollow and sepulchral as they reverberated through the wooded aisles. In a moment, a hundred voices took up the refrain, and repeated it over and over again. After a time, when the weird choir had, apparently, wearied of the first verse, the leading voice added two more couplets, which ran, as nearly as I can recollect, like this:

*“Yellow Queen she sit up on her throne,
And call all niggers what she own.*

*We’re comin’ and climbin’ because you call;
We’re yours, feet and hands and all.”*

The singers seemed to forget the toilsome climb, as they shouted the verses louder and louder. Some of them sang well in unison, while others paid little attention to what their fellows were chanting, but repeated the words to tunes of their own making.

Céleste joined in the singing, with a shrill, piping voice; and I believe that, for the time being, she even forgot the peril of her child. Many of the marchers had bottles, from which they drank, and, by the time we reached the end of the journey fully half of them were drunk.

"I'm glad to see 'em warm up," said Larry, over his shoulder; "for, the drunker they are, the easier it is going to be for us."

We finally reached a table-land, or shoulder of the mountain, five or six acres in extent, and almost denuded of trees. Here and there, charred upright trunks served to show where once a forest had stood, and in the centre of this group of gaunt skeletons rose a flat rock.

This stone was about thirty feet square, and its level top stood possibly ten feet from the ground. A flaming torch, planted at each corner of the rock, would have revealed plainly the actors on the stage, even without the assistance of a larger green flame, which blazed behind a man and two women standing near the centre. A crowd of at least three hundred negroes, of both sexes, was massed around the rock, absorbed in the ceremony, which had evidently just begun.

Our arrival with the other blacks attracted no attention; and, as we pressed forward to get within earshot of the altar, the mob broke into a chant, half French, half Spanish. The actors on the stage were waving their arms, and the man occasionally pounded a kettle-drum.

"Look!" whispered Céleste, pointing toward

the platform. "Yellow Queen in middle. In minute she see us and kill us dead."

"Shut your mouth, if you ever want to see your boy again," hissed Larry; and Céleste subsided. Her face looked chalky with fear in the green light.

The queen stepped to the edge of the rock, and waved her hands for silence.

"Bad men have come to Gabrielle," she cried, in Spanish, and in a loud, but not unmusical, voice. "If they live, Father Mountain will kill all his children. He has told his daughter that these white men must die. Their blood must go into the ground, to make the cane grow and the bananas ripen. If Father Mountain is not given this blood, he will spit out fire and ashes, and Gabrielle will be burned like a stick in the flames."

She paused, and the mob chanted again, louder than before.

We moved closer, and managed to gain a point within ten yards of the stage.

The Yellow Queen was, to my surprise, a woman of considerable beauty. She was a very light mulatto, taller than most of her Carib sisters, not more than thirty, I should judge, and graceful and shapely of form. She was dressed in a many-colored skirt, and wore about her a strange assort-

ment of decorations. These seemed to consist, for the most part, of tufts of feathers, beads, bones, and pieces of glass. In one hand she held a small snake and in the other a toad.

Her companions upon the platform were both aged negroes—a man and a woman—whose rags revealed rather than concealed their bones and parchment skin. Their function during the ceremony seemed to be to keep the torches alight; for at intervals they dropped into the flames something which caused them to flare upward, and, at times, to change color. The man frequently turned his attention to the ancient drum, and beat it vigorously.

“Bring forth the white cock and the white goat,” cried the queen. “Let Papaloi and Mamanloi spill their blood as an offering to angry Father Mountain.”

There was a struggle and a flutter in the crowd before the platform, and almost immediately a white goat and a white rooster were brought into view. The old man took charge of the goat, and the woman of the fowl, and each produced a knife for the execution.

“If Father Mountain has enough blood, he will sleep on,” cried the Yellow Queen, pointing dramatically toward the plume of smoke which floated

lazily from the funnel of the slumbering volcano.

"But if he wants more he will say so. Papaloi and Mamanloi, give us the blood."

She uttered a shrill cry at the conclusion of her speech, and the knives held by the old man and woman were buried simultaneously in the breasts of the struggling victims. The blood gushed from the wounds, and the goat bleated piteously in its death agony. The old priest and priestess executed a hideous dance around the platform.

"The God of the Mountain speaks! Hear him! Hear him!" screamed the Yellow Queen.

As if in obedience to her command, there was a low rumble in the bowels of the volcano, and the base of the smoke plume at its summit glowed fiery red.

"He must have more blood—more blood!" shrieked the queen. "He is still angry with his children."

As another and louder reverberation came from the roots of the mountain, scores of the blacks in the crowd began to sob wildly, while many threw themselves upon their faces.

"More blood!" screamed the queen. "Whose shall it be?"

"The blood of the White Calf," responded Papa-

loi and Mamanloi, gesticulating and bending their bodies in strange contortions.

"Where is the White Calf?" cried the mistress of ceremonies.

"He is waiting for the knife," shrieked the old woman.

"Then bring him forth," cried the Yellow Queen, tossing the snake and toad upon the rock. "Father Mountain shall have all the blood he wants."

A hideous, misshapen creature leaped upon the platform.

"The dog-man!" gasped Céleste, and fell, fainting, to the ground.

"He does look more like dog than man," exclaimed Sullivan. "I don't blame the woman for throwing a fit."

The creature upon the platform was hairy, apelike, and absolutely devoid of clothing. His legs were short, his arms long, his skull flattened; and, through the long gash which served him as mouth, two tusks protruded from the lower jaw. After he had executed a sort of jig to the beats of the drum, the monster leaned over the edge of the platform, and dragged up the form of Céleste's boy, Alphonse.

The child was evidently exhausted from the

long climb up the mountain and from fright, and could scarcely stand alone.

"Bring me the sacred knife," cried the queen, as she surveyed the child. "Where is the knife that was sent us by the God of the Mountain?"

"It is coming—it is coming," shrieked the old man.

"Yes, and trouble is coming," muttered Larry, drawing one of the bombs from his pocket.

"You'll kill the child, if you throw it up there," I exclaimed, imitating his action, and producing one of the nitroglycerine missiles from my pocket.

"I'm not going to throw it on the stage," replied Larry. "I am going to try to hit that tree over there, at the left of the rock. There's a ledge of rock behind it; and, if we miss the tree, the bomb will be certain to go off, anyway."

"Here is the sacred knife!" screamed the queen, brandishing a wicked-looking blade, which was handed to her from below. She approached the spot where Alphonse was held in the hairy arms of the dog-man.

"This blood is for you, Father Mountain," began the Yellow Queen, as she lifted the knife above her head.

She did not finish the sentence.

A tremendous, ear-splitting explosion rent the

air and threw her flat upon the rock. Larry's bomb struck the base of the tree trunk, and the great stick was shivered into toothpicks. A shower of stones and dirt fell all around us; and as a second explosion—from my bomb, which struck the ledge—split the ears of the crowd and hurled many from their feet, panic took possession of them, and they scattered like geese.

"The mountain is on fire! Run for your lives!" yelled Larry, imitating the Carib negro's Spanish intonation. As he spoke, he threw his second bomb against a tall, dead tree.

This explosion seemed to come from the mouth of the angry volcano itself; and those of the panic-stricken blacks who had not fainted or plunged into the jungle for safety, bolted for the pathway by which we had come.

By this time the queen had recovered her feet, and was vainly trying to reassemble her worshipers. "He wants more blood—more red blood!" she screamed, evidently badly frightened herself, but resolved, nevertheless, to go on with the ceremony. "Hold the calf while I use the knife."

The dog man, who had clung to Alphonse in spite of the force of the explosions, dragged the boy toward her.

"Fire off another torpedo," cried Larry, "while I give the dog boy a pill from my gun." As he spoke, he aimed his revolver at the hairy thing, and fired.

The creature turned a somersault in the air, and tumbled from the platform, with the boy still in his arms.

The queen whirled round and faced us. "There are white devils here!" she screamed. "That was one of their shots. Kill them! Kill them!"

Obeying Sullivan's command, I threw my remaining bomb at another tree, near the altar. Larry, at the same moment, made a dash in the direction of the place where Alphonse and the dog-man had fallen. I followed at his heels.

Either the force of the last explosion had thrown the queen from the platform or she had fled with her followers. Old Papaloi and Mamanloi were frenziedly running about the platform with their rags on fire.

"Here's the boy, but where's the dog-man?" cried Larry, as we reached the side of the rocky altar and found the little fellow unhurt, though weeping bitterly.

"I could swear that I hit his dogship squarely on the head," continued Larry, much mystified. "Perhaps some of the others carried him off."

On the way to the path leading down the mountain, we found Céleste, but could not revive her. "We will have to leave her here," decided Larry, after assuring himself that she was alive and unhurt. "We can take the boy with us. She knows the way home. The Yellow Queen and her people may be back most any minute, so I suggest that we hike out in a hurry."

We stumbled through the darkness to the edge of the plateau, and began our descent, unmolested. Below us, crashing down the tortuous pathway in their terror to escape from the wrath above, we heard the Voodoo worshipers running, stumbling, falling as they went.

"No wonder I didn't kill the brute," said Larry suddenly, after we had accomplished half the journey. "I should have had more sense than to fire at his head."

CHAPTER V

THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL LIES

THE rays of the morning sun reached the consulate before we did. Our progress down the mountain path was even slower than our ascent, for we took turns at carrying Alphonse. He weighed probably no more than fifty pounds; but, before we were halfway down the slope, I could have sworn that he tipped the scale at two hundred.

The terror of the last few hours had so preyed upon the little fellow's mind that he was in a high fever when we started, and, by the time we reached the foothills, three miles from the consulate, he was delirious, and fighting imaginary kidnappers in his dreams. Sometimes we had the utmost difficulty to keep him from leaping out of our arms.

After a while, however, he dropped into a sleep which was as unnatural as it was deep. To make my labor the harder, the pounding I had received

on the rock, when I was spilled from the boat, was recalled by the aching of my bruises, which gave me acute torture at every step. Had the journey been a mile longer, I am sure I should have dropped in my tracks.

The Stars and Stripes, floating over the consulate, its colors shining brightly in the morning sun, made one of the prettiest pictures I had ever seen; and I am sure I never saw a house that looked as homelike and cozy as the pretty, thatched cottage, set in its frame of emerald.

The consul was in the front yard, with his rifle over his shoulder, when we turned up the path leading into the grounds. He observed us at once, and came running in our direction, with a shout of joy.

"Hooray, hooray!" he cried. "They've come back safe, and they've got the boy."

He took the sleeping child from Sullivan's arms, and shook our hands vigorously. "My brave boys! Thank God, you are safe! Did you have a fight? Did you see the Yellow Queen? Aren't you hungry as bears? Here—wife, Norelle, everybody! The rescuers have returned."

With a rattling fire of questions and exclamations, and a torrent of congratulations, he led the way to the house.

"And how did you get through the night?" asked Larry, after the general's bubbling joy had boiled down, and we had assured him that we were safe and sound.

"We got along famously," replied the counterpart of Lincoln. "I'm proud of my little army—proud of them! Every one's a soldier to the backbone. Captain Billings and Mr. Hollis made grand sentries, and my wife and daughter are brave as a regiment. We didn't get much sleep, as you may imagine, for we were afraid the black rascals might come back; but we came through the ordeal in fine spirits."

Mrs. Pierson and Norelle came running to the porch, in response to the general's shouts, and the captain and Hollis made their appearance soon afterward. Mrs. Pierson took Alphonse from the general's arms, and at once put him to bed.

"To think of the perils you have braved!" she cried, coming from the room where she had left the child. "You brave, heroic, noble young men! I feel as though I could embrace you both."

"Sure, you may begin this minute," was Larry's gallant response.

"I suppose you had to kill just hundreds of those poor blacks before they would give up their

sacrificial victim," said Mrs. Pierson, beginning to weep at the thought. Then, to my dismay, Norelle, who had not spoken since our arrival, broke down, too, and joined her tears with those of her mother.

"Oh, please don't, ladies!" I cried, as a lump rose in my throat.

"We'll cry just as much as we want to!" snapped Norelle, her eyes flashing through her tears. "And you needn't flatter yourselves that we are crying about you, either; for we aren't. We're just crying to think of the poor, innocent, misguided negroes that you slaughtered—you brutes!"

"Why, Norelle, dear!" cried her mother, in shocked amazement.

"They're both about unnerved and unstrung," said the general, "and it's little wonder, when you think of what they have gone through during the last twenty-four hours."

"To set your minds at rest, ladies," said Larry, "we did not kill a single one of the black devils, though they needed killing, goodness knows. We just treated them to a good scare, sent them racing down the hill in a hurry, grabbed the kid, and here we are."

"But where is Céleste?" asked Mrs. Pierson,

noticing for the first time that the colored woman had not returned.

"Safe and sound. She'll be here soon," I said.

"We are wasting time," said General Pierson. "You know, dear, that our heroes must be half starved. They haven't had a drop or a bite since they left on their perilous journey, last evening."

"You bet we're hungry," exclaimed Larry, "and I'll give you fair warning that, unless you give us something to eat pretty soon, I'm going to begin on the doorknobs."

While we were doing justice to what seemed to me the best breakfast I had ever tasted, Larry and I told the company the incidents of the night. Mrs. Pierson, as was her wont, shed a few tears here and there during the recital; but Norelle's eyes were ablaze with interest.

"I never wanted to be a man so much in all my life," she exclaimed, after we had finished the narrative. "Just think of all the fun I've missed."

"Such language!" reproved Mrs. Pierson severely. "I do not consider that at all decorous, my dear."

"Can't help it, mother mine," replied the girl. "It's not my fault. The times are to blame. They've got out of joint with decorum, that's all."

When we had concluded the meal, the general

arose, with the announcement that he was going to town, as soon as he had completed the preparation of a note to the state department at Washington.

"I intend to make a peremptory demand for a war ship at St. Croix," he said. "Our lives are no longer safe here. We are likely to be butchered at any moment by the fanatical followers of this yellow woman, who seems to be running the island. If Spain cannot protect the lives of those whom she is bound to safeguard under international law, it is high time for the United States to take a hand. If the administration refuses to send me a ship, by George, there'll be a vacancy in my post! I'd stick it out without asking for help, if I were a single man; but I owe it to my wife and daughter to demand protection from this Voodoo woman's fiendishness. Do you not agree with me, gentlemen?"

"We do!" I exclaimed warmly. "But you may count on us as long as we can be of the least assistance to you."

"We'll be with you as long as we've a drop of blood left," added Larry.

"That's my sentiment, to a T.," said the captain.

"I O. K. all of that," exclaimed Hollis.

"It's ever so good of you, gentlemen, and I

appreciate it to the full," said General Pierson. "You are all brave and gallant fellows, but for that you do not deserve especial praise. You are all good Americans, and, as such, cannot help toeing the mark to the fighting line, when womanhood is in danger. Just the same, there are plenty of men who would have decamped and left us to our fate. Believe me, my wife, my daughter, and I thank you from the bottom of our hearts."

We all looked somewhat embarrassed under this open praise, and Larry hastened to change the subject, by asking the consul if he could accompany him to town.

"You know," he said, "there is a certain American tourist, now in Gabrielle, whom I am very anxious to meet. It is just possible that he is now taking in the sights of your capital."

The general agreed readily, and I made a faint effort to join the party also; for I believed it to be my duty to go along, if there were any chance of meeting Varney. At the same time, I was nearly dead on my feet. Aching and weary as I was, I marveled at the force of will and muscle that drove Larry to further exertion.

"I think, Jack, you had better stay here," said Larry. "The ladies need your protection. You are not in fit shape to do any more walking to-day.

Stay here and get a good rest, old man. You needn't fear that I'll bag the game without you. The very best I can hope to do is to locate him. We've corralled him on the island, where he can't get away from us; so we needn't worry over the outcome of the chase. We'll get him."

"While the general is preparing his note for the state department, I will write a dispatch for the *World-Union*," I said. "Will you be good enough to see it aboard the steamer, Larry?"

"I'll swim with it to New York, if necessary," asserted the warm-hearted detective.

In spite of my weariness, I wrote more than a column, detailing Varney's movements from the time when he left New Orleans to the landing on Gabrielle. I devoted considerable space to the manner in which he outwitted the police of the Crescent City, the chase across the Gulf, and the storm and fire which forced him to abandon his tug and land at St. Croix in a rowboat. I addressed the dispatch to the superintendent of the telegraph company at New York, the first American port touched by the departing steamer, and inclosed a request that he wire it to the *World-Union* from the metropolis. I also gave Larry a ten-dollar gold piece for the purser of the boat, who, with this as an accelerator, would probably

see that the manuscript was delivered to the office of the telegraph company without delay.

"This will score beat number one, if it gets there," I exclaimed, with some satisfaction, as Larry placed the dispatch in his pocket.

"I haven't one bit of curiosity, Jack, my boy," said Larry, "but I'm hoping that you didn't put the people wise to the way Varney slipped through my hands, on the way."

"You don't suppose I could afford to miss a good story like that, do you?" I asked, with a wink at the general.

"Then you can carry your own blooming dispatch to St. Croix!" exclaimed Sullivan, looking as though he had lost his last friend on earth.

"I wouldn't write that for a thousand dollars—indeed, I wouldn't!" I protested, with a laugh.

After the general and Larry had started for the village, Mrs. Pierson and Norelle went to their rooms for a much-needed rest. Captain Billings and Mr. Hollis insisted that I follow the example set by the ladies; and, after a feeble resistance, I obeyed.

"We'll stand watch while you get a couple of hours' sleep," said the captain.

When I awoke it was dark, and I could hear the voice of Céleste crooning over her boy in some

room on the lower floor. I arose softly, and, going to the top of the stairs, looked over the banisters.

Norelle was turning the gloom into brightness, downstairs; and I said to myself that she was the sweetest little lamplighter in all the world.

As I descended the stairs, Céleste ran out into the hall, and, dropping on her knees, kissed my hand. "You save my Alphonse; I die for you—I die for you!" she cried.

"If you want to die for any one, die for Sullivan," I said. "He saved your boy, not I."

"What on earth do you think has happened to the general and Mr. Sullivan?" asked Mrs. Pierson, in an anxious tone of voice, as I entered the sitting room.

"Why, haven't they got back yet?" I asked.

"They should have returned two or three hours ago," continued Mrs. Pierson. "Norelle and I are dreadfully worried."

"I don't wonder at it a bit," I said incautiously; then added, to reassure her: "But, after all, there is nothing to be alarmed about. They can take very good care of themselves, never fear. If you say so, however, I'll be glad to go in search of them."

"Where would you search?" asked Norelle,

whose pale face and anxious eyes cut me to the heart and made me yearn to comfort her as only a lover can. "You know nothing about St. Croix in the daytime—much less at night."

"We might hunt at the steamship offices, and other likely places," suggested Billings, who entered from the yard at that moment.

"And leave us all alone, at the mercy of the Voodoos!" wailed Mrs. Pierson. At the very thought of such a fate, the good woman burst into tears. She stifled her sobs in a moment, however, as the sound of a revolver or rifle shot was heard in the distance.

"It was a shot!" exclaimed Norelle.

Billings and I dashed out of the house, drawing our revolvers as we ran.

"Where did that shot come from?" I asked Hollis, who was standing guard outside the door.

"From down the road toward town," he replied.

We strained our eyes through the darkness, but could see nothing save the shadowy forms of the trees; nor could we hear anything more suspicious than the droning of insects, and the calls of night birds in the jungle.

Then we heard a voice.

"Hallo—hallo!" The shout came from down the road.

"It's the general!" I exclaimed, and halloed in reply.

"Bring a lantern," came a faint command, this time in Larry's voice.

I rushed back into the cottage, seized the lantern from its peg on the wall, lighted it, and ran out again. "They are both back safe and sound," I cried reassuringly to the ladies. "Haven't any idea what they want with the light; am going to find out," I added, as they besieged me with questions.

I hurried down the pathway into the road.

"Straight ahead, Jack," I heard Larry call, and was at their side in the space of two or three minutes.

They were both bending over a dark object. It was evidently the form of a man, either grievously hurt, or dead, for it did not stir when I came up with the lantern.

"Who is he?" I asked, handing the lantern to Larry.

"That's what we'd like to know," replied General Pierson.

Larry held the lantern so that its rays illumined the swarthy, mustached visage of a man of forty. A long, dirk-like knife was lying beside the prostrate figure, and, as I gazed curiously at the

weapon, I was horrified to see a thin, black stream creep from beneath his arm, and make its silent way to the edge of the path, where it formed a slowly widening pool.

"Heavens!" I cried. "The man is bleeding to death. Who stabbed him?"

"He ought to die, the thug," said Sullivan.

"But who stabbed him?" I repeated the question with a shudder.

"He wasn't stabbed. I shot him," replied Larry shortly.

"Let us see how seriously he is wounded," said the general, opening the unknown's vest, as he spoke, and revealing a black, powder-burned hole in his shirt bosom. The bullet had entered about two inches below the shoulder.

"Not likely to prove fatal," observed the general. "It was too high to strike the lung; so it's only a flesh wound, after all. Let us get a shutter from the house, and put him to bed."

"But what did he do?" I asked, completely mystified over the gruesome proceeding.

"He tried to kill me, and would undoubtedly have succeeded, but for the quickness of Mr. Sullivan," explained General Pierson.

"He waylaid you as you were coming home?" I asked, horrified.

"Just so. There were a couple of them," continued General Pierson. "They sprang out upon us, one from either side of the road, but, luckily for us, they misjudged their distance in the darkness. Sullivan floored one of them with a blow of his fist, and then turned his attention to the other fellow, who was attacking me. How on earth he managed to shoot the assassin without blowing my brains out, is more than I can understand, but the fact remains that he did it—and mighty quickly, too."

"What an experience!" I exclaimed, looking down at the figure in the road.

"Oh, that's only one of a number of interesting little events that have happened this day," remarked Larry cheerfully. "Haven't we had a fine time of it, general?"

"I hope I'll never put another such a day over my head," said the consul fervently.

"What else happened?" I asked

"Oh, a whole bunch of things, first and last," said Sullivan. "Met our mutual friend, for one thing."

"What! Varney?" I cried.

"Just so. Didn't I tell you that I'd locate him? Well, I did."

"We'd better hurry home and get that

stretcher," interrupted General Pierson. "The sooner he gets attention, the better it will be for him. We can tell our experiences to the whole company at supper. For my part, I'm ready to do justice to almost any sort of a meal."

"I can hold up my end at the table, I guess," remarked Larry, picking up the lantern and starting in the direction of the house.

"Why didn't you arrest Varney, when you had the chance?" I asked, as we hurried along. I was consumed with impatience to hear the story.

"Who said I had a chance to get him?" asked Larry testily.

"You said you met him, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did; but meeting a man and putting him behind the bars are not one and the same. I didn't arrest him, because I couldn't. And, what is more, we may run into a whole lot of difficulty before we do land him."

"Just unhinge one of those blinds, captain," said the general to the river man, as we reached the gateway; then, to Mrs. Pierson and Norelle, who were upon the porch, he called: "We'll join you in a few minutes. We're all right, and happy, but hungry as wolves."

I carried the blind which Billings brought, and

we proceeded back over the road to get the wounded man.

"Well, this is queer!" exclaimed Larry, after we had walked quite a distance. "We have certainly passed the spot where we left the scoundrel."

We searched diligently up and down the road, and finally came to the pool of blood.

"He was playing 'possum, and decamped just as soon as our backs were turned," said the general.

"Or his companion in crime dragged him away," I suggested.

"I think it would be wise to give up the search," said Sullivan; "for one or both of those chaps may take it into their heads to pot at us from the bushes. We don't need the fellow, anyway, and I'm rather relieved than otherwise, to think we are rid of him so easily. Had we kept him, we would have been obliged to prosecute him in court, and that would have made us a lot of trouble."

"That's a very sensible way to look at it," agreed General Pierson.

So we abandoned the hunt and hastened back to the consulate.

Mrs. Pierson threw herself into her husband's arms. "My hero!" she cried. "I feared you

would never return. What on earth detained you so long?"

"When you hear all the harrowing details, you will agree that this has been our busy day," replied the general, patting his wife's head as he would that of a little child. "We have brandished revolvers, have had various and sundry encounters with bad men, and have had a most thrilling time generally."

"Oh, tell us about it!" cried Norelle, clapping her hands ecstatically at the prospect. "If these sensations continue, Mr. Smith will never be able to do justice to the assignment. It will take a whole staff of journalists to tell half the story."

"Not a word until we get something to eat, my dears," said the general decisively. "We cannot tell our thrilling story on such empty stomachs as ours."

"Then I'll help Céleste dish up, so that we can eat the sooner," said Norelle. "But, mind you," she added, as she paused at the door, "not one word of the adventures until I get back; for I don't want to miss a syllable."

"That's a promise," said Larry.

"Did you meet any Voodoos?" asked Mrs. Pier-son, after Norelle had left the room.

"Not one," said the general.

"I guess," remarked Sullivan, "the Yellow Queen has about concluded that she'll run her religious show without the assistance of Céleste's boy. She had better reach that conclusion, if she knows what's good for her—eh, Jack?"

"Don't be too sure that you have her beaten," admonished General Pierson. "Joan of Lazarre is vindictive, and has a long arm. Do not underestimate her strength; for, as I told you before, she is the real, dominating power on the island."

"Ladies and gentlemen," exclaimed Norelle, with a flourish, appearing at the door, "supper is now being served in the dining room. Passengers who change cars at Voodoo Station will please step lively."

"That means us, Jack," said Larry, springing to his feet. "Madam, permit me." As he spoke, he offered his arm to Mrs. Pierson, who accepted it with a low bow.

I was about to offer mine to Norelle, but, to my disappointment, she seized her father's coat sleeve, and led him into the dining room, favoring me with a mischievous glance, however, which half recompensed me for my loss.

As soon as we were seated at the table, she exclaimed: "Now, daddy, commence. I just can't eat a mouthful until I hear the news."

"Well," began the general, with a flourish of his knife. "I'll give you the most important and thrilling piece of news at the start. Mr. Sullivan is to fight a duel with the governor-general at sunrise to-morrow."

"What!" we all cried. "A duel?"

"A duel," repeated General Pierson, enjoying the sensation he had created. "A duel with forty-five-calibre revolvers; so you may know that it is no play affair."

"Oh, do not do it, Mr. Sullivan, I beg of you—do not do it!" cried Mrs. Pierson.

"Go on, daddy—go on," said Norelle, ignoring her mother's flutter of terror. "Now, what did Mr. Sullivan do to make the governor-general challenge him? I know that Mr. Sullivan must have had the choice of weapons, for no Spaniard would ever choose forty-fives."

"Quite right, little girl," agreed her father. "Why, Mr. Sullivan really didn't do very much to him. He simply jammed his hat down over his nose, slapped him in the face two or three times, and then kicked him out of the door—really nothing that any gentleman should object to, I'm sure."

"Well, of all things!" cried Norelle. Then she turned to Larry, and asked: "Why did you treat the gentleman so harshly?"

"He prevented me from taking the thief I was after," replied Larry. "Besides that, he made a number of very impolite remarks in my presence, and lied outrageously to the United States consul."

Lary then turned his attention to the soup, and began to eat with evident relish.

"Oh, go on—please go on!" exclaimed Norelle impatiently. "You know we are just dying to hear all the rest of it. What did you do? What did Varney do? And what did the governor-general do?"

I do not think that poor Mrs. Pierson was able to recover her breath during the remainder of the meal. All she could do was to gasp occasionally, as one sensation after another was sprung and explained. For my own part, I must confess, I was so much astonished at the unexpected chain of events that you could have knocked me down with a feather.

"That's all there is to it," said Larry, in answer to Miss Pierson's demand. "The gentleman with the plug hat challenged me; I accepted, very naturally; and we will have it out in the morning." He ended his remarks in a matter-of-fact tone, and resumed his meal, as though the whole account were finished.

"That is not all there is—not by a long sight,"

cried General Pierson, now gesticulating wildly with both knife and fork. "If you'll not do the story justice, Sullivan, I'll have to tell it myself."

"Oh, go on, daddy—go on!" cried Norelle. "Mr. Sullivan is altogether too modest. What's the use of doing things, I'd like to know, unless you tell people about them?"

"This is how it came to pass," began the consul. "After we had visited the steamer at the dock, and had left Mr. Smith's article for the paper and my note for the state department, Mr. Sullivan and I started out on a little hunting expedition for the banker. We soon ran across two or three very promising clues, but all of them seemed to fizzle out.

"We learned that Varney had been to the Hotel Madrid, but had left the place, bag and baggage. The driver of the cab which had taken him to the hotel assured us that he had driven him to the palace of the governor-general and had left him there. So to the palace of the governor-general we went, posthaste.

"It took us some little time to obtain an audience with his excellency; but when we finally landed in his sanctum sanctorum, he slobbered over us as though we were the President, the supreme court, and both houses of congress all

rolled into one. The usual amount of blarneying on both sides being disposed of, we finally got down to business, and I explained Mr. Sullivan's mission. Mr. Varney, we told him, had been last seen entering his palace; and if he wanted to play the part of a real friend of the United States, it was up to him to tell us where we could find the gentleman."

"Did he tell you?" asked Norelle as her father paused for breath.

"He lied like a thief," continued the narrator. "Said he had never seen or heard of such a man. Did he but know anything of his whereabouts, however, it would give him the most superlative pleasure to put us on the track. He would give us his sacred word of honor, which he prized several times more than life itself, or his hope of the hereafter, that he would at once order his captain-general of police to apprehend the man instantler. And he further assured us, on the memory of his sainted mother and of his honorable ancestors, that twenty-four hours should not be allowed to pass over our heads before we should have the fugitive under lock and key. After some more of the same sort of tommyrot of the Spanish diplomatic brand, we left, with mutual expressions of undying affection.

"By the merest good luck, on the way back to the hotel, we passed by the cab stand in the plaza, and one of the jehus hailed us. It was the man who had taken the banker to the governor-general's palace. Did our excellencies desire to know more about the gentleman of whom we were inquiring? We guessed we did, about one peso's worth. Then he told us that he had seen Varney entering the Plaza Restaurant, not ten minutes before that selfsame moment.

"So into the Plaza Restaurant we went. No trace of Varney was there, however. As we were somewhat weary from our long hunt, we decided to remain in the restaurant for some refreshment, and took seats at one of the tables. While we were waiting for our order, who do you suppose entered the place?"

"Varney," I cried, breathless with excitement.

"Wrong. The governor-general," said the general, pausing to allow the sensation to work its proper effect.

"He had come to meet Varney by appointment, to make a deal of some sort with him," cried Norelle.

"Just so; or, at any rate, that is the way Sullivan figured it out," continued General Pierson. "I, myself, was too thick-headed to see through it

at first. Well, anyway, to resume: The governor-general sailed into the restaurant, followed by five or six of his gold-laced young officers. As soon as he laid eyes on us, he changed color, I thought, but carried it off pretty well; for he bowed very low, smiled beatifically, and passed on through the room. When he reached the far end of the place, a door closed after him and his party."

"And then Mr. Sullivan went in after Varney," said Norelle, her eyes ablaze. "Oh, I just know that is what he did!"

"He did, and I followed him," agreed the general. "The waiters tried to oppose our progress, but Sullivan tripped up one, and shook his fist in the face of a second so fiercely that he lost all desire for further interference."

"And Varney was in there?" I cried.

"He was, as large as life. So was the governor-general, and his gold-laced officers, but their presence did not disconcert Sullivan one iota. Varney and the governor-general were just clinking glasses as we entered, unannounced. Sullivan had both his revolvers out in a wink; and Varney, who was facing us, was the first to see our entrance. As his eyes took in the revolvers, he dropped his glass of wine on the floor, with a crash.

"The governor-general showed a good deal more pluck than I thought he possessed, for he quietly put his glass upon the table, turned around, and, springing at Sullivan like a cat, caught both his wrists in his hands.

"'Arrest the American dogs!' he cried to the young officers of his staff. But they were not made of the same sort of stuff that he was, and all wilted.

"I had my revolver out, by this time, and was covering a couple of the pretty boys in gold lace. They backed into the corner of the room, and held up their hands, as though they expected me to go through their pockets. Probably, down there, every time a man pulls a gun, the other fellow expects to be robbed."

"Yes, yes! Go on, daddy—go on!" cried Norelle, as her father paused and very deliberately took out his handkerchief to wipe his spectacles.

"What happened to Varney?" I asked.

"Varney disappeared through the back door, during the excitement, and we haven't seen him since," continued the general. "It took Sullivan just about half a minute to put the governor-general's fighting apparatus out of commission. He could no more hold Sullivan's wrists than he could a locomotive.

"In less time than it takes to tell it, he had the governor-general's two hands held in one of his like a vise, had backed him up against the wall, and was talking to him like a Dutch uncle.

"I was almost sorry for his excellency, for it must have been very humiliating to his Castilian pride. Jamming his excellency's head against the wall, with his two hands shoved up under his chin so that his face made an attractive mark, Sullivan slapped his excellency's right cheek.

"'Take that,' he said, 'for lying to the United States consul this afternoon. And that, for lying to me,' he continued, slapping his excellency's left cheek.

"'Take that for refusing to give up a fugitive from American justice'—another slap—'and that, for having such a worthless lot of officers on your staff'—shoving his excellency's hat down over his nose—'and that, for daring to lay your hands on the representative of the greatest chief of police in North America.' With the last remark, Sullivan turned his excellency around, and kicked him out of the door, through which Varney had made his escape."

"And what did the poor fellow do?" asked Norrelle. "I think he was treated just brutally. My sympathies are on the other side."

Larry looked a little crestfallen at this unexpected reproof, but said nothing.

"What could he do?" replied the general. "By this time, half his fighting force had disappeared, and the other half was helpless in the corner, with their hands up over their heads. His excellency picked himself up as quickly as he could, shook his fist at Sullivan, and demanded 'satisfaction.'

"'I challenge you to meet me at daybreak tomorrow!' he hissed.

"'I'm yours at sun-up; we'll use forty-fives at ten paces,' said Sullivan.

"That ended the affair, and we came home."

"And, on the way, two friends of the governor-general met you in the dark!" I exclaimed, my blood hot with indignation at the thought.

"By George, I never thought of that!" cried General Pierson.

"I did," said Larry. "A little more of that fish, if you please."

CHAPTER VI

AT THE DUELLING GROUND

THE end of another night of anxious vigil found the little band at the consulate in a highly nervous state of mind.

The General was irritable, and Mrs. Pierson was even more prone to tears than usual, if such a condition were possible. Norelle had become wan and pale, but her beauty was more radiant than ever. Larry, Billings, Hollis, and I were all pretty well fagged out, and, when the ladies were out of hearing, indulged in more profanity than was necessary, meanwhile planning various horrible modes of execution for the Yellow Queen, should she ever fall into our hands.

Things had been bad enough before the General and Larry had visited St. Croix; but now, with the added peril of the duel hanging over our heads, I most heartily wished that Mr. McCalla, my editor in St. Louis, had selected some other promising

young newspaper man for the star assignment of the year.

I had not slept more than two hours that morning, when Sullivan waked me. "Are you going to act as one of my seconds, or are you going to sleep all day?" he demanded, shaking me by the shoulder.

"Oh, the duel!" I cried, rubbing my tired eyes, and looking out of the window into the dull gray dawn. "What time is it?"

"Four-thirty, and the sun will be up in an hour," he replied. "If you want a cup of coffee before you start, you'd better be moving."

"I don't want anything to eat or drink," I replied, "and shouldn't think you would, either,"

"Don't worry about me," laughed Larry cheerfully. "Save your sympathy for the other fellow. He needs your prayers—not I."

"But he may shoot you, just the same!" I exclaimed apprehensively.

"He hasn't the ghost of a chance," retorted Sullivan. "I'll kill him at the first shot, if I want to. I wonder if he has a family? I think I'll find out before the affair comes off, and, if he has, will merely break his pistol arm or his leg. I really don't care to send him over the divide, for he's

no coward, even if his pretty officers are sissy boys."

"But he'll kill you, if he can."

"I wouldn't be at all surprised," chuckled Larry.

General Pierson was at the breakfast table when we got down. "If you are as prompt in shooting as you are in rising," he said to Larry. "I'll have no fears for the outcome."

"I'm not worrying at all, at all," said Sullivan, seating himself. Then he asked: "Any trace of the blacks during the night?"

"Not a sign," replied the general testily. "By George, I'm getting so sick of this night-watch business that I wish they would come and have it out. I'm beginning to think they have abandoned the game. Still, we must not relax our vigilance. The very first night we took off the guard would be the time they'd pay us a visit. Nevertheless, I'm somewhat encouraged with the situation; and if the governor-general was off my mind, I could really begin to view the future with an optimistic eye."

"You can use that eye right now," exclaimed Larry. "But where is the captain? He was to act as my other second."

"Outside, squinting at the weather, I believe," said the general. "But, to return to the duel—

for I can't think of anything else—do you know, Sullivan, I wish I was a private citizen, so I could attend the function in person. I do not approve of duels as a general thing; but when they can't be avoided without injury to a gentleman's standing in society, and especially, when the challenging party resorts to the hiring of assassins, I say let them be real fights. Your choice of forty-fives stirred my blood as it has not been stirred these thirty years."

"But you can go along and see it, can't you?" asked Larry.

"It's absolutely out of the question. Think of the scandal it would make—the United States consul present at the duel in which his excellency the governor-general was wounded or killed! The President would order my recall by the first steamer."

"You're sure going to miss the fun of seeing a hot-tempered Spanish gentleman get hurt," remarked Larry gravely. "But I guess, after all, that wouldn't be such a pleasant sight. Before we start, general, I wish you would give us steering directions. Where did his excellency say it was to be pulled off?"

"In the grove beyond the cathedral cemetery," replied the consul. "You can't miss the way."

Just follow the road we took to town yesterday, and turn to the right at the second intersecting street. The cathedral is on the brow of the hill at the end of the street, and the cemetery is on the high ground east of the building. Here's a map of St. Croix and suburbs—and here, at this point, is the cathedral."

General Pierson produced a map, and pointed out the spot and the street we should take to reach it.

Captain Billings entered as we were examining the map.

"That's right—sail by chart!" he exclaimed approvingly. "No matter where you are going, on sea or dry land, it's always a grand plan to work by chart."

Just as the first rays of the sun tipped the caps of the mountains with silver, we started for the trysting place of death. I'll omit a description of Mrs. Pierson's tears, and her remarks upon the occasion, which were as hysterical as usual. I would, if I could, tell you of the lovelight I thought I saw in Norelle's eyes, and describe for you the thrill in our handclasp at the door.

"Remember, the honor of the Stars and Stripes must be upheld!" cried General Pierson after us, as we walked rapidly down the path.

When we reached the second road leading to the uplands, and turned our faces toward the tall spire of the cathedral, a great bell tolled dismally from some church in the city. After a brief space, another bell rang out upon the morning air—and yet another, and another. Soon, the deep tones from the cathedral above us joined in the sonorous refrain.

“They seem to be tolling for the dead,” remarked Captain Billings.

“I think it is some feast day,” said Larry.

“It sends the chills up and down my back,” I exclaimed. “I don’t like to hear it, especially upon an occasion like this.”

We were the first to reach the duelling ground, and I was glad of the opportunity thus afforded to admire the beautiful scene spread out below us.

A crescent of pearls in a setting of emerald, St. Croix nestled between the mountains and the sea. Her white houses glistened prettily in the rays of the new sun; and, high over our heads, like a feather in a woman’s hat, the plume of smoke from Mont Lazarre’s smoldering fires stretched miles out over the silent sea. Eastward and westward from Mont Lazarre were other peaks, rising blue and hazy into the fleece-flecked sky. Save for the tolling of the bells, all was

quiet on Gabrielle; for the island was yet abed.

But, even as we stood spellbound by the scene, a change came over the town below. The roll of drums and the blare of bugles were lifted to our ears; and, as the sounds floated upward, around the corner of the governor-general's palace, and into the great public square, swept line after line, and company after company, of marching soldiers.

"Pretty early for military manœuvres, don't you think?" commented Larry.

"There must be fully two regiments of them," exclaimed the captain, as the troops continued to pour into the square.

"The governor-general is late," I said. "It begins to look as though he was not going to keep the engagement."

"There's a horseman coming this way," cried Larry, pointing down the road up which we had come.

"And at a pretty good clip, too," remarked the captain.

The rider was urging his steed as though he were charging an enemy's battery, and came up the incline at a pace that would have killed any ordinary horse.

"It's one of Plug Hat's young staff officers," said Larry. Then he added: "But there's no

dodging the fact that he can ride like a cowboy.”

The horseman dashed up to where our little group was standing, and drew rein so suddenly that the big bay came to his haunches.

“Bad news—deplorable news, señors!” he exclaimed with a salute.

“What is it?” we cried in a breath.

“His excellency, the governor-general——” He began, then stopped and crossed himself.

“Is not ill, I hope?” exclaimed Larry.

“Is dead!” cried the officer. “He was found strangled in his bed this morning. He was murdered during the night.”

“Then there will be no duel this morning,” said Larry, “unless you, señor, have come to take his excellency’s place.”

“I? No, thank you, señor!” exclaimed the officer, with a laugh. Then, sobering at once, he continued: “I can serve my dead commander far better, I think, by trying to discover and punish his murderer.”

“Then you do not even know who killed him?” I ventured.

“No,” he admitted. “We do not know by whose hand he died, but we do know who ordered the vile deed done.”

“Who?” asked Larry.

“The Yellow Queen—the Voodoo scourge, of course. But I swear by the Virgin that, if the Lord gives me strength for a few days, we will rid the island of this blight! See the troops down there? General Bolero is now preparing to march into the mountains, for the purpose of exterminating that she-devil and all her followers. He has declared war to the death against the Voodoos. Every negro, not a Christian, who is found upon the island from this day forth, is to die. The whites are being called in from the suburbs, and the town is under martial law. Messengers have been sent forth to carry the warning to all outlying dwellings. The American consulate is outside of the protected zone; and it was for the purpose of giving the consul and his family timely notification, as well as to explain his excellency’s unavoidable non-appearance, that I rode this way. Remember, it is death to all blacks who are not vouched for by the priests. *Adios, señors.*”

The young officer rode away, and we hastened back to the consulate with all possible speed.

When we reached the house, we found that the grim news had preceded us. General Pierson and his family were already busily engaged in packing up their belongings, for removal to the city. Hollis was assisting them in the rôle of Chief

mover. By good luck, he had managed to secure a pony and cart, and was shouldering trunks, boxes, and valises with the adroitness and speed of an expressman.

"Perhaps I ought to stay and fight it out," said General Pierson doubtfully, "but I am convinced that, in this crisis, 'discretion is of valor the better part.' Even President Lincoln, I feel sure, would do just as I am doing, if his dear ones were threatened as mine are now. But you wait until they send me that war ship! With two or three companies of marines from the *Texas*, I could stand off all the Voodoos in the West Indies."

The sun set, that night, in a bath of blood, and Mont Lazarre's menacing rumblings shook the earth so that the very walls of the Hotel Madrid, where we had sought temporary quarters, rocked upon their foundations.

But redder than the skies, and redder than the tongues of flame that licked the volcano's mouth, were the streams that poured from the thresholds of the negro huts in the environs of St. Croix. When the troops returned that night, dusty, weary, and sickened with their day's work, they reported to General Bolero that three hundred heathen blacks had fallen before their rifles and machetes.

"Did you get the Yellow Queen?" demanded Bolero of the officer who brought him the report.

"No, general—not yet," was the reply.

"Then you will kill six hundred Voodoo worshippers to-morrow, and a like number every day thereafter, until that wench is caught!" cried General Bolero. "Thus will I avenge his excellency's foul murder, and put an end to Voodooism in Gabrielle."

At ten o'clock that evening, a messenger came to the hotel and asked for General Pierson. When the consul returned to the parlor, where Larry and I were seated in the company of the ladies, he said:

"Let us go upstairs. The consulate is on fire, and we may see the flames from the upper balcony."

CHAPTER VII

THE OTHER MAN IN THE CASE

YOU will thank me for dismissing the terrible events of the next two weeks as briefly as possible.

The town was an armed camp, and every day the screams of tortured negroes in the square made an awful accompaniment to the tramp of soldiers and the beat of drums. In retaliation for the slaughter of her people, the Yellow Queen prosecuted throughout the island a campaign with knife and torch. Every white man's home was burned, and hundreds of valuable sugar, tobacco, and coffee plantations were laid waste.

In spite of the utmost vigilance on the part of the soldiers—in spite of thick walls and double-bolted doors—three other prominent Spanish officials were murdered in their beds. The prosecutor, who prepared the informations and appeared at the trials of several hundred Voodoo worshipers, was found one morning with the handle of a dirk protruding from the bosom of his nightshirt.

The judge who presided over the same court and sentenced the blacks to death was discovered with his hands and feet bound together, hanging by his neck from the headpost of his bed; and, to complete the ghastly trilogy, Colonel Aguilas, who for ten days had led General Bolero's soldiers on their merciless pursuit of the Voodoos, was discovered, at dawn, gagged and strapped to the cot in his tent. His orderly, who went to awake him, thought at first that the colonel was asleep, but ran out of the tent, screaming with terror, when he turned down the coverlet and found the cot swarming with centipedes!

Nearly every square inch of the colonel's body bore a sting, and his sufferings before death must have been horrible beyond description.

General Bolero himself, it was whispered, had received warning from the Voodoo Queen that the fate in store for him was to be more terrible than that of any of the others. If such a message had been conveyed to him, it did not swerve him one inch from the bloody path he was pursuing. On the contrary, he hunted down the Voodoo people more relentlessly than ever, drove their bands deeper into the mountains, and put to death, with even more fiendish methods of torture, those who fell into his hands.

It was said that General Bolero never slept; and when I chanced to meet him, one day, surrounded by his armed guards, I said to myself that I could well believe the story—for he looked like Death himself. His coal-black eyes, burning from yellow, hollowed cheeks, glared restlessly about, as though momentarily expecting to meet the queen's avenger. His head was forever wagging from side to side, and he started and trembled at the least unusual sound.

Although our movements were necessarily hampered by the exactions of military rule, Larry and I searched industriously for Varney. But our hunt was vain, and, after two weeks had slipped by without bringing forth the faintest trace of the missing man, we were forced to the conclusion that he had either left the island or had been killed by the blacks. If he had taken refuge in the mountains—as was more than likely, after our encounter at the restaurant—it was almost certain that he was dead; for, in their frenzy for reprisals, the Voodooes had murdered every man, woman, and child of Caucasian blood upon whom they could lay hands.

General Pierson was nearly as unhappy as Larry and myself. The old gentleman chafed under the collar of idleness which events had forced

upon him, and, although he established his office in the hotel and attempted to carry on the business of the consulate, he found practically nothing to do. Commerce stood still in the city, and throughout the island; the government was in a state of chaos, pending the appointment of a new governor-general; and, with military rule within the city, and black anarchy without, the situation was discouraging in the extreme. I wrote a number of articles for my paper, and shipped them north by the infrequent steamers; but I realized that, unless something turned up soon, I should be obliged to return empty-handed to the States.

Although I was not acquitting myself with much credit in the news or in the detective line, I was making great progress in another direction. I was falling so deeply in love, that, I told myself, I should never be able to reach the surface again, and look upon the world with the same eyes that I had used before coming to Gabrielle.

But, as day by day I became more and more the abject slave of Norelle's slightest whim, I found, to my distress, that she was growing fickle as a summer breeze. Often, when I called to take her upon our daily walks around the military lines, or up to the cathedral for a view of the city and the sea, she would send me word that she was

busy writing letters, or was sewing, and did not care to go.

Then I learned of another man in the case.

Until the appearance of the green-eyed monster, I had borne my rebuffs with some measure of philosophy; but as soon as I became convinced that there was a good-looking Spanish gentleman on the Piersons' visiting list, I was beside myself with rage. I lost my appetite, grew morose, and even threatened to take the next steamer for New York.

But when the ship weighed anchor, I was not found upon the purser's list. Wild horses could not have dragged me from the spot where my little tormentor was housed; and, had I received peremptory orders to go home without delay, I feel certain that I would have sent back my resignation and remained to be tortured.

"You're making a fool of yourself, Jack," said Larry, one day. "If this thing goes on, your friends won't dare to speak to you, for fear of having their noses bitten off. Come, now; cheer up. She's got eyes for none but you, my lad."

"Then she's got a mighty odd way of showing it," I retorted. "Running around town with that Spanish fellow! Didn't she take luncheon with him yesterday—and didn't she make one of his box party, the night before?"

"But the party was given in honor of her father," said Sullivan.

"In his honor—fiddlesticks!" I exclaimed. "He gave the party solely to get her to go to the theatre with him, and you know it. Who the devil is the fellow, anyway? Do you know anything about him, Larry?"

"Not very much," he admitted. "Except that his name is Sagastor, and that he's got no end of money. He's been around town for two or three weeks, and seems to be hand in glove with all the Spanish officers. But don't let him spoil your digestion, old fellow. You've nothing to fear from him. Norelle Pierson is a sensible girl—altogether too sensible to think of hitching herself to some foreigner because he happens to have a title and a little money."

A day or two later, I gritted my teeth with anger when I read in the papers the announcement that this same Sagastor had been appointed to the vacant governor-generalcy. Even the subsidized papers of St. Croix were unable to tell their readers anything definite concerning the new official. They spoke in the vaguest terms about his distinguished lineage, of his great executive ability, and of his unlimited wealth.

But throughout the city one heard little praise

for Sagastor. When his name was spoken in the cigar stores and restaurants, he was called an upstart, an importation, an imposition upon the island and its people. His sole qualification for the place, the gossips said, was the price paid the home government for the place. In these days, when the administration at Madrid is so hard pressed for cash, Mr. Moneybags can have anything he wants. It is disgusting. However Sagastor came by his office, there was no belittling the brilliance of his inauguration. A magnificent pageant of soldiers and civilians, of churchmen and municipal dignitaries accompanied him to the cathedral, where he received the blessing of the archbishop, and made oath of allegiance to the church. Following the religious ceremony, Sagastor took the legal oath of office at the palace, and announced the members of his cabinet.

"The new governor-general is starting out mighty well, I think," observed General Pierson, at supper, that evening. "He has issued a proclamation abolishing martial law, and has granted a full pardon to the Yellow Queen and all her followers."

"There aren't many Voodoos left to pardon, are there?" I asked. "I shouldn't think the queen had a corporal's guard left, to-day, after all the

thousands that have been wiped out by Bolero."

"There are twenty thousand of them left, if there's one," replied the general. "You have no idea of the density of the negro population in other parts of the island. Bolero's soldiers never marched more than ten or fifteen miles from the city during all their negro-killing campaign."

"What do you think of the new official?" I asked.

"I think he will make a first-rate executive," replied the general. "You see, I've been acquainted with him for some little time. He was a guest at the hotel for several days, while waiting for the formal announcement of his elevation to the office."

"And I knew he was to be governor-general a week ago," put in Norelle, with a toss of her head.

"You appear to have a very confidential acquaintance with him," I snapped viciously. "I suppose you like him pretty well."

"I think he is perfectly grand," she replied, with a dazzling smile.

"It takes only a little gold lace to turn a girl's head," I blurted out, getting up from the table with murder in my heart.

"And it takes nothing at all to make fools of some young men," retorted Miss Pierson.

CHAPTER VIII

VARNEY REAPPEARS

LARRY rushed into our room and began throwing articles of clothing into his valise. He was evidently in a state of high excitement; for he exclaimed:

"Jack, we've got him—we've got him dead to rights!"

"Got whom?" I asked.

"Who do you suppose? Varney, of course."

"Why don't you lock him up, then?" I asked.

"Are you packing your things to go home?"

"I'm going to lock him up before the day is over," replied Larry, continuing his hurried packing; "for I'm going after him with the bracelets this very minute."

"Then I'm going, too," I cried, taking on a measure of his excitement, "I've got to be in at the finish of this hunt, you know. Where is he? Who gave you the tip? How are you going to take him?"

As I sent in a rapid fire of questions, I pulled my valise from under the bed, and began to toss things inside, in imitation of Sullivan.

"He's hiding over at Angeles, on the other side of the island. Been there for two weeks, the crook, and is to sail for Spain to-morrow. But I'm sorry to say, old man—the fact is, I've got to do this job alone."

"What!" I cried. "You mean to tell me that I'm not going with you? Oh say—I call that pretty shabby! Why can't I go?"

"Because I had to promise to go alone, or not at all," explained Larry. "It was a case of take the tip that way, or not get it at all."

"And who gave you this wonderful information?" I asked sourly.

"The captain-general of police," replied Larry. "His secret service men located Varney over there, and are to help me take him when I reach Angeles. As far as that is concerned, though, I don't need any help. I could take him myself, any day he ever drew breath. Now, don't you be cut up over it, old partner. You know that you'll be in on the glory and the cash, share and share alike. You really ought to be glad to be spared the trouble."

"But it is just as important for me to be in at

the death as it is for you!" I exclaimed. "I have my orders as well as you have, and I've just got to go—that's all there is to it."

My face must have reflected the keen disappointment I felt; for Larry hastened to say sympathetically:

"I'd like best way to have you along, Jack; but just can't take you. That's the final word. If you act ugly, and insist, I'll be obliged to call the thing off, and we'll never get him. As I said before, I've got to go alone, or not at all. I've given my word."

"Well, it looks mighty suspicious to me!" I cried bitterly "They just want to get you out in some God-forsaken place and put you out of the way. You'll be ambushed on the road, mark my word. I wouldn't go a step. It looks crooked, and you know it."

"Gee, but you're a suspicious young person, aren't you?" cried Larry, with an assumption of spirits which I do not believe he felt. "Now, what possible motive could the captain-general have for giving me the wrong steer? His bread is buttered on the other side; for I've promised him five hundred dollars if he gives me the tip that lands our man."

"Well, I've said all I can," I retorted sulkily. "But you just look out for yourself—that's all I have to offer. You'll, at least, go heeled, and leave

the bulk of your coin with me for safekeeping." I tossed my clothing back into the chest of drawers, and kicked the satchel under the bed.

"Say, what do you take me for—a kid?" demanded Larry. "Any joker that wants to hold me up on the road is welcome to try it, but I'd advise him to order a headstone first."

Heavy, indeed, was my heart when I looked out of the window, ten minutes later, and watched Larry drive away in a two-wheeled cart. He was accompanied by a man whose face I could not see, but whose shoulders were as square as his, and who seemed to be even taller than he.

Still filled with misgivings, I went downstairs, and had a talk with the clerk of the hotel. Angeles, he told me, was a small fishing town on the northern side of Gabrielle, and was reached from St. Croix by a tortuous trail leading over the shoulder of Mont Lazarre.

"What sort of a harbor has Angeles?" I asked.

"None to speak of," replied the clerk. "It can accommodate a few fishing boats, but none of any draught. St. Croix has the only harbor worthy the name in Gabrielle."

"How often do ships clear Angeles for Spain?" I asked.

The man laughed aloud. "Just about as often

as they do for heaven," he replied. "I told you that ocean-going vessels could not be accommodated in the harbor."

"Thanking the clerk, I hurried upstairs, and packed a few articles in a hand bag; then ran up the flight of steps to the floor above, to enlist the services of Captain Billings and Hollis. I was resolved to follow Larry to Angeles, with all possible haste. Had I heard the conspirators plotting Sullivan's death on the road, I could not have been more certain that he was running into a trap.

The information about the harbor at Angeles proved the captain-general of police a liar; and all that I lacked in the way of information about the attack which I knew would be made upon Larry, was the exact location of the spot. If I could not reach the scene in time to prevent the ambush, I might at least rescue him, if he were taken prisoner, or avenge his murder, if he were killed.

With the detective out of the way, Varney would be safe in Gabrielle. He could pay the captain-general of police one hundred thousand dollars for Sullivan's head, just as easily as the latter could offer five hundred dollars for his. The embezzler, doubtless, figured that, after he had removed the detective, it would be an easy

matter to snuff out the newspaper man, if the latter should fail to take the hint and leave the island. Sullivan was the man to be feared, and Sullivan had obligingly walked into his net.

As I hurried by the Piersons' suite, on the floor above, I was startled to encounter a Spanish captain of cavalry standing outside the door. I halted in front of him.

"What are you doing here at the door of the United States consul?" I demanded hotly.

"I have my orders, señor," he replied mildly.

"Orders to watch the consul, eh?" I cried. "By Jove, you'll not stand here long! This espionage won't be tolerated a moment longer."

I was fast working myself into a passion, and had half a notion to thrust my revolver down the young man's throat.

"Señor has no cause for anger," he said, in a conciliatory tone. "Believe me, señor, I am not spying, or performing any other unpleasant duty. I am the governor-general's aide. His excellency is making a call upon the consul, and I am merely waiting for him to conclude his business."

The captain was so decent about it all that I would straightway have apologized, had his last words not aroused the tiger of jealousy within my breast.

"Oh, ho! He's calling upon the consul, is he?" I sneered. "You had better say upon the consul's pretty daughter. It may not be polite, but, by gad, I'm going to take part in that tête-à-tête, myself. I'll put my oar right into this pond, now; and I don't care a rap whether the boat tips over or not. I might just as well have it out now as later."

"Señor is unduly excited, and had better retire to his apartment," advised the captain, not unkindly. "Possibly he was up late with his friends."

"I don't blame you for thinking me tipsy," I said, a little more calmly. "Pray, pardon me, captain; but the thought of the governor-general, of all men, visiting here thus early in the morning, upsets me more than you can imagine."

"I have had affairs of the heart, myself," he said sympathetically. "But do you not think it would be wise to wait until his excellency departs, and you are in a calmer mood?"

"I am calm—perfectly calm!" I cried, my anger leaping to the boiling point to belie my words. "And, what is more, I wish to meet the governor-general, face to face."

"Just as the señor deems best," said the captain, with a bow, stepping aside to let me pass.

"I assure you I have no warrant to bar his passage. Nevertheless, I believe my counsel wise."

Not deigning to answer him, I threw wide the door, and strode into the little hallway upon which opened the various rooms of the suite. Proceeding to the door of General Pierson's office, directly ahead, I knocked, and, receiving word to come in, obeyed the order.

The general was alone, as I had surmised. He looked up in a preoccupied manner from a pile of documents, and asked:

"What can I do for you, Smith? Nothing? Well, then, you'll pardon me if I go ahead with my work. You'll find the women folks in the sitting room. Walk right in." And he buried his nose in the papers.

I did as he bade me, and entered the sitting room, but realized on the instant that I had arrived at a most inopportune moment.

The governor-general was evidently in the midst of an impassioned declaration; for he was clasping Norelle's hand, and was pouring a torrent of words into her ear. She was seated in a chair, and he was bending over her; and, in the momentary survey I took of the tableau, it seemed to me that she was yielding to his suit. If she were not, why did she allow the man to hold her

hand without protest? Why did she suffer him to proceed with his odious love-making?

Neither heard me open the door; and as I stood there upon the threshold, my hand instinctively sought the rough grip of my revolver; for there was murder in my heart, and I should have delighted in sending a bullet crashing through that black crown, so near the sunny curls I loved.

There was something strangely familiar in the governor-general's voice. Surely I had heard those tones before. But where?

I slammed the door behind me, to give the lovers due notice of my presence, and as the man whirled round, to glare fiercely at me, his identity was revealed.

"Do you not see that we are engaged?" he demanded, in hoarse, angry tones.

Norelle had risen to her feet, with a gesture of impatience; but I observed that the man still grasped her hand.

"I beg the young lady's pardon," I exclaimed, with a bow to Norelle.

"And mine, señor, as well," said the governor-general, in a still more angry voice.

"I think you might have the politeness to leave," Norelle finally said, her face suffused with blushes, but her firm lips and darkening brow

showing that she regarded my appearance as an unpardonable intrusion.

"Leave you—with him?" I cried, advancing into the room, and pointing my finger at the man. "I wonder if you know who he is? If you had the faintest idea of his identity and character, you would no more allow him to touch you than you would the deadliest snake in Gabrielle."

"Have a care!" cried the governor-general threateningly.

"He is my friend, and my father's friend," said Norelle; "and while he is in our house, he shall be protected from insult. I, therefore, ask you, Mr. Smith, to leave the room at once."

"Not until you hear me through!" I stormed, in still louder tones. "Not until I tear the mask from that man's face."

"I shall hold you responsible for every word you utter," hissed the governor-general.

"I know what I am saying, Joe Varney," I cried. "I also know your black record. Your face is in the rogue's gallery of every town in the States, and, by Jove, I'm going to take you back there, you thief, to stand trial for robbing a city full of widows and orphans!"

"You lie!" he shouted, his face livid with rage. "For this I shall have you whipped within an inch

of your life in the public square. I'll teach you to insult me in the presence of the young lady who is to become my wife."

"Liar!" I screamed, fairly beside myself. "Before I'd see her your wife, I'd see her in her grave, and put her there myself. Any woman were better dead than linked to a creature like you."

"By God, I'll kill you for that!" cried the masquerading embezzler, whipping out a dagger and rushing at me. Norelle screamed; General Pierson and the Spanish captain burst into the room through one door, and Mrs. Pierson through another.

"Stop! This is American territory," cried the consul. But Varney bore down upon me, with his knife upraised, and, just as the blade was about to descend, he felt the chill muzzle of my revolver thrust against his throat.

"Drop the knife," I cried, "or, by the eternal, I'll blow daylight through your neck!"

The dagger fell with a rattle to the floor; and, as I glared into his eyes, I could see the blood receding from his veins, and his face take on a sickly, greenish hue of fear.

"Stand where you are, captain," I cried, over my shoulder, to the advancing Spanish officer. "Another step by you means his excellency's death."

"No farther, captain, I beg of you!" pleaded Varney, whose trembling knees now threatened to let him to the floor. "Please leave the room at once, captain; for I think Señor Smith and I can settle our little differences without your aid."

I heard the captain's footsteps receding rapidly, and was certain that he had gone to summon help for his commander. Within a few minutes, I knew, the hotel would be surrounded by a cordon of soldiers, and I should be caught like a rat in a trap.

"If it were not for making a mess on the floor, and distressing Miss Pierson and her mother, I'd end your career right now!" I exclaimed, boring the revolver barrel deep into Varney's throat, until he whined with pain. "But I'll spare you, for their sakes. Now, I'm going to join Sullivan on the wild-goose chase you sent him on. But we'll come back soon and get you, you thief—mark my words; we'll get you! Good-by, Miss Pierson; good-by, Mrs. Pierson; good-by, general. You had better revive your guest. His excellency has developed a sudden weakness."

As I spoke, Varney's legs gave way, as though some one had struck him in the middle, and he crumpled up on the floor.

I turned and ran out of the room at full speed.

The hotel lobby was almost deserted, and only the clerk, and one or two loungers, looked up as I dashed out of the door, and down the street, in the direction of the nearest carriage house. I was thankful that the livery stable was located on a side street; for, when I turned the corner, I was out of sight from the hotel, and, unless I had been observed, I was beyond danger of immediate pursuit.

"A horse—a saddle horse, at once!" I cried, rushing into the stable, and shaking the proprietor, who sat dozing in a chair.

"Going for the doctor?" he asked, arising and hurrying to the stalls.

"More urgent than that," I exclaimed. "I ride for the priest. Even now, the poor man may be passing away, with all his sins upon his head."

"Holy Virgin!" he cried, crossing himself. "I pray you may get him in time. Pay me when you return. You are at the hotel, are you not; with the American consul?"

"Yes—many thanks," I replied, throwing myself into the saddle. "But you had better take your money now." And I dropped a gold piece into his hand, as I dug my heels into the horse's sides and dashed out of the door.

"Peace to the soul of the dying!" cried the stable

keeper piously, as he again crossed himself, and settled into his chair for a continuation of his nap.

As I rode down the street, I could hear the clank of arms and the marching of men in front of the hotel, around the corner on the other street. One square I rode toward the sea, then westward for four. I then deemed it safe to head for the north, in the direction of Mont Lazarre. Crossing the street of the plaza and the Hotel Madrid, I cast a hurried glance to the east, and saw that the thoroughfare was filled with soldiers.

"Guard the hotel well, my men!" I cried exultantly, as the fresh breeze from the sea filled my lungs, and the tingle of battles to come coursed through my blood.

The good little horse beneath me seemed to be charged with some of my spirit; for he sniffed the air joyfully, and broke into a gallop that put five miles of rough mountain road between us and the hotel within the hour.

By and by, we came to a clearing, from which we had a magnificent view of the city and the bay. The plaza was filled with marching soldiers, and a bell was clanging from the governor-general's palace.

CHAPTER IX

THE BATTLE ON THE ROAD

IT WAS mid-forenoon, and I had not encountered a person on the upward journey.

As I drew nearer to Mont Lazarre's mouth, the breeze from the sea shifted the great smoke plume over my head, and the horse and I were soon covered with an impalpable coat of lava dust.

A weird, crooning chorus from above broke upon my ear, and seemed to approach. Fearing that it was some troop of Voodoo worshipers on the way to one of their orgies, I forced the horse into a thicket beside the road, and waited for the singers to pass. Although the new governor-general's proclamation of peace and amnesty had ended the wholesale butcheries on both sides, I deemed it still unsafe to meet a considerable number of the blacks alone; so it was with some anxiety that I watched for their coming.

You may guess my relief, when, instead of a

fierce band of warriors, armed with machetes and firearms, there emerged from the narrow roadway in the trees, half a dozen negro women, bearing baskets of bananas and yams upon their heads. They were doubtless on their way to the market place at St. Croix.

Sallying from my place of concealment, I created some little consternation in their ranks, but soon reassured them by holding my empty hands aloft and calling to them that I was a friend. They answered in kind, and chattered volubly when I asked them if they had met two white men riding toward Angeles.

They had indeed met the white men, and the white men had paid them an unheard-of price for bananas. One of the white men was red of hair, and the other black.

I pushed on as rapidly as possible.

In another hour, I reached the shoulder of the mountain, and, as I stood at the top of the rise, could view the sea on the north as well as on the south. The city of St. Croix was a white patch, no larger than half a button, down by the water's edge, and the sails of the biggest ships in the harbor were mere specks. On the northern coast, I could see another town, much smaller than St. Croix, which I decided must be Angeles.

The beauty of the scene did not hold me long; for I felt that Larry's safety—perhaps his very life—depended on the speed I should make. The horse, though still panting from the long climb, started at a brisk pace on the downward journey.

After making about three miles, I halted the horse, and listened; for I thought I heard a distant shot. While I was straining my ears for a repetition of the sound, a series of screams—or, more correctly, squeaks—awoke the echoes of the forest below. Then there came a patter of bare feet; and a black boy, clad solely in a straw hat, came dashing up the incline. The regularity of his squeaks and hops reminded me of a mechanical toy.

The inky apparition had made exactly nine hops and three squeaks before his eyes encountered my figure. The sight brought him up suddenly, and he turned, as though to go back again. But fear, or weariness, or both, put escape out of his power; and he threw up his hands, to collapse in a little heap on the road. I shouted to him, but he made no answer or motion; so I rode down to where he lay, and slapped him smartly with my hat. But he still lay as though dead, and I might have believed him so, but for a slight motion of his closed eyelids.

"White man kill black boy if black boy does not get up," I cried, in Spanish.

The black youngster leaped to his feet, and threw himself on his knees beside the horse. "Peppit be good! White man no shoot!" he wailed, in terror.

"Well, see that you *are* good," I commanded. "Now, tell me what you are running and yelling for?"

"Him big fight down there," he replied, beginning to sob hysterically, and pointing down the mountain as he spoke. "Him big fight. Shoot—blood—machete!"

"Who are fighting—white men, or black men?" I demanded.

"One, two t'ousand white men. Big fight. Shoot—machete—blood!" he cried.

"You're a little liar," I exclaimed, reaching down and shaking him roughly by the shoulder. "There aren't a thousand white men in Gabrielle."

"Peppit no lie—Peppit tell truth. Him big fight," he said stubbornly.

"Are you going to tell me the truth, you little rascal, or will I have to use this?" As I spoke, I drew my revolver and brandished it threateningly.

"No shoot, white man—no shoot!" he yelled.

“Peppit tell truth when he say more than two white men in big fight. Here all men in fight.”

He held up both hands as he spoke. The right one was open, with all the fingers outspread; and the left had only the index finger displayed.

“There were six? You are sure of that, are you?” I asked.

“Yes—white men, like this,” he agreed; and, as he spoke, he seized a twig that lay beside the road, broke it into six pieces, and placed them side by side in the dirt.

“Good!” I exclaimed approvingly. “Now, tell me, Peppit—did you see a wagon down there where the men were fighting—a thing with wheels, round, like this?” I made a ring in the air with my fingers.

“Yes,” he answered, nodding vigorously. “Him wagon at big fight.”

“How many wheels on wagon?” I asked.

“Round things like that? So?” He held up two fingers.

“Good boy, Peppit!” I cried, throwing him a peso. “Go home now, and buy yourself some molasses, or candy, or whatever you black kids like. I’m going to get into that scrap, and make it two to five, instead of five to one.”

As I spoke, I dug my heels into the horse’s

flanks, and slapped him on the ears with my hat.

Down the road galloped the animal, every leap promising to be our last; for broken pieces of rock were strewn thickly upon the pathway, and here and there, deep holes and ruts had been worn by tropic rains. The game little saddler must have had chamois blood in his veins; for he raced down six hundred yards of treacherous incline, as sure-footed as a goat, and, almost before I had time to draw my revolver, had hurled me into the midst of my enemies.

I had scant time to look at the tableau presented upon that narrow mountain trail—scant time to see Larry, bound hand and foot, beside the roadway, or to note the fact that one of his foes was stretched dead, with mouth and eyes wide open to heaven, while another lay moaning a few feet away, his face crushed in as though from the kick of a mule, and his head soaking in a pool of blood.

With a shout, I galloped into that open slaughterhouse, shooting as fast as I could pull trigger at a trio of Spaniards, who leaped to their feet to return my fire with a rain of bullets.

One of the fellows threw up his arms and pitched forward on his face before I had gone twenty yards, his shrill cry proclaiming the fact that one of my bullets had found a vital mark. A

second of the fighting trio must have stopped a projectile with his leg, for he dropped like a crippled dog, but continued shooting from the ground.

I was now almost upon them, and dug heels into the horse, with a triumphant cry, intending to ride down the third marksman, whose barking revolver was spitting fire in my face.

"You can't hit a barn door!" I yelled exultingly, and in another second my horse's hoofs would have ground him into the earth.

There was a crash as of big buildings crumbling, and a singing in my ears, such as I heard one day when I stood in the path of a cyclone and saw the havoc wrought by the monster of the air. Then I knew nothing.

When I reopened my eyes to consciousness, I was pitching and jolting in a cart, my hands and feet bound, and my body doubled up like a jack-knife. My head was splitting with pain, and I suffered excruciating agony in one shoulder.

"You sure put up a fine scrap, but why the devil did you butt in the way you did?" asked a voice at my elbow.

It was Larry, beside me in the cart. One glance showed me that he was pinioned as I was, while above us on the seat was an ugly fellow, who scowled darkly at us as we spoke. Another

Spaniard was walking along beside the horse.

"Where are we?" I asked.

"On the road to trouble, as near as I can make out," replied Larry.

"But where's my horse? They ought to fetch him along, too."

"That horse of yours is just now too full of holes for a pepper box. I don't see, for the life of me, how you ever got as far as you did with those three dagoes pumping lead into you."

"Are you hurt?"

"Not much, except in the vanity department," replied Larry. "Oh, I am the prize mark! There's no getting around that fact. Why, I acted just like a kid—walked into their trap just as though I was a trained pup!"

"But you must have made things hot for them," I said as soothingly as I could.

"Lots of good that did!" he retorted bitterly. "And lots of good you did, too. They did me up to the queen's taste, and now they've got us both. Why the devil didn't you show a lick or two of sense, and make a sneak on the camp, instead of sailing in just as though you had the whole United States Army at your back? But, then, what's the use of talking? We're both too young and unsophisticated to leave our mothers, anyway."

We rode along in gloomy silence for a mile or two. Every stone encountered by the wheels of the cart caused us to groan as our hurts were jarred, and whenever he received an unusually severe jolt, Larry would turn loose upon the Spaniard a picturesque volley of American oaths.

"Where do you suppose they are taking us?" I asked, after a time.

"Back to St. Croix, I suppose," replied Larry. "Back to where Varney will probably show his hand in some devilish way or other."

"He's likely to have us garrotted in the public square, or order his soldiers to throw us from the walls of Morro Castle," I added cheerfully.

"His soldiers?" echoed Larry, with scorn. "I'd like to know what soldiers that crook can muster? All he can do is to work some dirty underhand game with the governor-general, and he's quite equal to that."

"Unfortunately, he can call out every yellow coat on the island," I exclaimed.

"What on earth are you talking about? The bumps you got on your head must have knocked a few bricks loose in your upper story." Larry looked at me as though he really thought me crazy.

"I know just what I am talking about," I con-

tinued. "I'd feel a good deal better if I did not. Why, don't you know who Varney is now? But, of course, you don't; for I didn't find out about it, myself, until after you left."

"Well, come out with it!" cried Larry impatiently. "Say, you yellow-bellied pirate, if you don't drive that horse more carefully over these ruts, I'll bend your nose to the back of your neck and hang our suspenders on it!" The last part of his speech was delivered to the Spaniard in the cart, who only scowled more fiercely than ever, and gave the horse a vicious cut with the whip.

"Go on, Jack—go on!" groaned Larry, as the wheels struck another deep rut. "Put me wise to the works."

Between my own exclamations of pain, I gave him as clear an explanation of past events as I could. Had the conditions of travel been more pleasant, I should have enjoyed hugely the changing expressions of amazement, anger, and self-reproach that came to his face during the recital. When I told him of the personal encounter with Varney in the hotel, he chuckled heartily.

"Good boy—good boy!" he cried. "I couldn't have done it as well, myself. I'll bet you made a great hit with the girl, when you turned that trick."

"Hit!" I exclaimed derisively. "So much of a hit that she ordered me from the room."

"All the better, my boy," cried Larry. "Now you can be sure she loves you. Oh, I know the dear creatures like a book."

"You don't know Norelle," I retorted. "No rule applies to her."

"Now, let me tell you, my son"—began Sullivan. Then he broke off with: "Well, what do you think of that?"

The cart came to a sudden stop, and the driver uttered a loud Spanish oath.

It was the last curse his lips ever framed; for, like a gleam of light through a riven cloud, a short-handled spear whizzed through the air above our heads, and buried itself in the Spaniard's breast. The hand he had raised, to point a revolver in the direction of his foe, fell inert upon his lap; but the other hand still clutched the reins, and stiffened over them with the grip of death.

In another moment, the road was filled with chattering negroes; and the Spaniard afoot was overwhelmed by a dozen stalwart blacks, who tied his hands behind him and led him from our sight.

A tall, copper-colored woman—whom I at once recognized as the Yellow Queen—directed the

movements of the negroes. She was accompanied by the aged Voodoo priest and priestess—Papaloi and Mamanloi—who had assisted in the sacrificial ceremony on that long-to-be-remembered night upon the mountain.

"It needs only the sweet face of the dog-man to make the picture complete," remarked Larry, in an undertone.

"Out of one trouble, into another," I said. "Now, I'd like to know what will happen to us."

"We'll probably be eaten alive," replied Larry cheerfully. "I ought to be, too, for making such an ass of myself."

Meanwhile, the Yellow Queen had issued a number of imperious commands to her followers, during which she waved her supple arms frequently in the direction of the volcano. About half the crowd, men as well as women, hurried up the path to do her bidding, while the others remained as an escort to her majesty.

The Yellow Queen came toward us. "Release the white strangers," she commanded, in Spanish. "If the dogs of Spain have made them prisoners, that is sufficient to secure their pardon from Joan of Lazarre."

"Thanks awfully, your majesty," exclaimed Larry, bowing low to the woman. "Now, if you'll

only add to this favor a bite or so to eat, we'll vote you ail to the good."

"You shall eat, Red Head," replied the queen. "You and your friend, Fair Hair, shall eat soon with me. Joan of Lazarre will be hospitable to the Americans, even though it is against the will of Father Mountain. Hear him! He is angry with his daughter. One of these days, he will punish her."

A mighty rumbling of the earth answered her words; and some of the negroes, terrified at the thunderous threat, wailed aloud.

"Come," ordered the queen. "The feast is being prepared. Fair Hair will ride with Joan of Lazarre. Red Head will walk beside us."

"No, no," I objected. "I'm not as badly hurt as my friend. I will walk, and he will ride."

"Joan has spoken. You will ride. Help Joan into the cart, Fair Hair," was her decision; and I obeyed, although I detected a grin on Larry's face. In the woman's voice, and in her flashing sloe-black eyes, there was a spell which I was powerless to resist. The hand that clasped mine when I helped her into the cart was like a coal of fire.

Joan spoke a few additional words of command to her followers, and we started up the mountainous path.

Larry trudged beside the cart, and the negroes surrounded and preceded us, marching to the time of a funereal dirge, droned by several of the men.

As we proceeded up the grade, Larry made several ineffectual efforts to draw from the queen some hint as to our destination. To all of these, however, she said:

"Joan acts first, and talks afterward. Red Head shall learn when Joan is ready."

"Well, I guess that Red Head doesn't care where you're going, old lady," exclaimed Larry, after the last rebuff of this sort. "I heard some time ago that what you said 'goes' here on the island, but I never thought till now that *I'd* go when you said: 'March!' "

Several times during the journey, I discovered the brilliant eyes of the queen regarding me fixedly. They seemed to bore into my innermost heart.

"When will Fair Hair marry the American girl?" she asked suddenly, after we had gone on in silence for a time.

"I do not know that I shall ever marry her," I replied, feeling the blood mount to my temples as I spoke.

"Have you asked her to be your wife?"

"That is none of your affair, Joan of Lazarre!" I retorted angrily.

"Perhaps there is another who has a tighter hold upon her heart than Fair Hair," she continued, with quiet effrontery.

"She has a perfect right to marry whom she pleases!" I blurted out, in a passion. "I have claim neither on her hand nor on her heart."

"Why didn't you tell her what she wanted to know in the first place?" exclaimed Larry. "I'm beginning to think the yellow lady isn't such a dummy, after all."

If Joan felt any elation over the victory of her wit, she did not show it; her face was as serene as the surface of the Caribbean, which we were soon to view again. Occasionally she turned her gaze upon me; and, strive as I might to overcome the feeling, I began to fear the power that lay behind the brilliant orbs set in the tawny frame of her strange face.

I noticed that she wore a necklace of rubies. The red gems seemed to break into jets of flame as the jolting of the cart caused them to move about over her throat and bosom—a bosom that would have shamed no sculptor who might have given it to his bronze Juno or marble Venus.

In time, we reached the shoulder of the moun-

tain, over which I had passed earlier in the day, and again beheld the northern and southern pictures of the sunlit sea. Lazarre's great smoke veil hung directly over St. Croix, and the shadow cast by the sun seemed to blot out the city.

The queen observed the omen; for she cried, waving her arm at smoke and town:

"Some day, Father Mountain will go down to crush St. Croix, just as his shadow now cuts off the light. He will avenge the murder of his children by the Spanish devils."

A rumble in the remote bowels of the earth—low, but distinct and menacing—seemed to answer the prophecy. I shuddered in spite of myself, and glanced at Larry, to see if he, too, had been touched by the chill finger of premonition.

He was standing with his elbow resting on the cart, and his eyes lost in the far north distance, as though trying to pierce the space that separated him from home. He started and changed color.

"It'll be a bad day for those dagoes down there," he muttered, "when the mountain goes down to St. Croix. And when it happens, I'll bet a dime that the yellow girl, here, will be in at the death."

CHAPTER X

THE YELLOW QUEEN STRIKES

INSTEAD of descending from the shoulder of the mountain by the road to St. Croix, as I had expected they would, the negroes turned to the west, plunging through a thicket of stunted pines.

The cart was laboriously hauled through the trees by the negroes lending hand at shafts and wheels; but soon the going was easier, for we reached more open ground, and discovered traces of an abandoned road. After we had traveled possibly two miles; we heard shouts ahead, which were immediately answered by members of our own party.

Within a few minutes, we came to what appeared to be a blank cliff, which lifted its rocky face perpendicularly to a height of four or five hundred feet. We still heard the voices that had been calling to us; and, at first, I thought that my ears deceived me, for no human beings were in

sight. But the path took a sudden turn, and, passing around a corner, led into the yawning opening of a cavern, around the mouth of which were grouped half a hundred negro men and women.

The opening in the mountain was twenty feet high, and fully as wide, and, inside, its inky blackness was revealed rather than dispelled by numerous flickering yellow lights.

At sight of us, the negroes set up a shout of welcome, which the Yellow Queen acknowledged with a wave of her arm and a word of greeting.

"We have arrived, Fair Hair," she exclaimed, turning to me.

I leaped from the cart and helped her down; and, when she had alighted, she still clung to my hand with her burning grip.

"We will enter," she said, in tones even more imperious.

I attempted to drop her hand; but she refused to release my fingers, and we walked into the cave side by side, Larry following closely at our heels.

As soon as my eyes became accustomed to the gloom, I saw that a long table had been set in the centre of the cave. Upon huge wooden platters and leaves of tropic plants was spread a feast of meats, fish, fowl, bananas, and yams. Nor was

liquid refreshment lacking; for in great earthen crocks was what I afterward discovered to be a supply of rum and native spirits, made from the dregs of the sugar crop.

"Bow to the queen—bow to the queen!" chorused a hundred voices, and half a dozen black performers began a crazy medley of discord upon native drums and reed instruments.

Nimble preceding us, in spite of their great age, Papaloi and Mamanloi ran to the right side of the cave, each seizing a light from one of the torch bearers.

"The Daughter of the Mountain is here," cried the old man.

"The Daughter of the Mountain is here," echoed the woman.

All the negroes in the gloomy tunnel threw themselves upon their faces, and, in answer to a signal from the queen, the old priest and priestess hurled their torches into a heap of inflammable material against the wall. A crimson flame, forty feet long, and as high as the roof of the cave, burst forth and illumined the grotesque scene.

Instinctively, I made a step as though to run for the cavern's mouth.

"Fear not, Fair Hair," said the queen, still holding my hand with her fierce grasp. "The flame

is only a bright light set to guide our hands to our mouths at the feast. It will not burn."

I could well believe her; for, although we were within six feet of the great sheet of flame, I could scarcely feel its warmth.

"Be seated here at my right hand, Fair Hair," continued the queen. "And you, Red Head, take the place at Fair Hair's right. Papaloi and Mamanloi will be at my left."

Thus we seated ourselves, with our backs to that weird blaze, which, as long as it continued to burn, cast our monstrous shadows over the faces of the hungry blacks on the opposite side of the table, and played strange pranks in the sooty corners of the cavern.

"Eat, my children!" cried the queen. "Eat and drink of the bounty which Father Mountain has given us. Eat, that you may be strong; drink, that you may be full of courage, to cast the Spanish devils from the land that was given to your fathers."

A roar of cheers and curses, mingled with the clash of steel, answered her words. Many of the negroes waved machetes above their heads, while others drew from their tattered garments gleaming daggers and rusty revolvers.

The warlike demonstration did not last long,

however; for in another moment the black mob was at the food and drink, with hoggish eagerness. They seized great portions of meat, tearing them apart with their white teeth, and stuffed down whole yams at a gulp. The gourds, which served as cups for the rum and spirits, circulated with increasing rapidity; and, as the feast progressed, quarrels and blows were of frequent occurrence.

"Eat, Fair Hair!" cried the queen, leaning toward me, and throwing her arm around my neck. "I would that my guest displayed more appetite."

I tried to shake off her arm. It seemed like the coil of a snake.

"I am not hungry," I exclaimed, but poorly disguising the loathing I felt.

"Joan is not hungry, either, Fair Hair," she replied, holding me still closer with her bare arm. "Joan is not hungry for food. She is famished for love."

"Don't fast on our account," said Larry, who had overheard only the first part of the Yellow Queen's remarks. "Get busy and dig in, if you want to. If you don't, there won't be enough left for you to put in a hollow tooth."

Finding that my efforts to shake off Joan's arm

were unavailing, I made no further protests; for I realized that one word from her might bring serious consequences to us both.

The sounds of fighting increased along the table as the liquids sank in the earthen jars, and, more than once, the queen was forced to rap sharply upon the board in front of her and threaten the disturbers with punishment. Now and then, one of the mob, sated with drink, would fall from his or her seat, and would be unceremoniously kicked aside by the others. In this manner the ranks were thinned considerably, and only those with stronger heads and bodies remained upright.

"Where is the dog-man?" asked Larry.

It was an unwise question, for the queen released me long enough to shake her finger at him, while her eyes blazed with anger. "He is here!" she cried. "Here, and well enough to do my bidding, in spite of the bullet that you sent against him. You were a fool, to think you could harm the queen's messenger."

As she concluded, she pointed toward the end of the table. The misshapen creature was there devouring the mass of victuals in front of his hairy chest. As we looked, he uttered an angry snarl, snatched the hand of a woman who sat

beside him, brought it to his mouth, and tore it with his tusks.

The woman uttered a shriek of pain.

"Serves her right," cried the Yellow Queen, with a laugh. "She should not be fool enough to try to steal the dog-man's food."

"You are a wonder!" exclaimed Larry, resuming the subject, which had been interrupted by the exhibition of ferocity. "So you were wise to the game we played, that night on the mountain?"

"I know everything that takes place on Gabrielle," she retorted boastfully, "and I warn you, now, that Joan of Lazzarre is not to be cheated of what is hers by Red Head or any other stranger from the north. If he still opposes her, she will cast a spell upon him that will twist his bones, turn his blood to water, and cause his flesh to rot with leprosy."

"Cheerful, I must say," replied Larry, smiling in spite of the gruesome threat, which sent a shudder to my heart. "I'd rather be friends than enemies with you, young lady; but you can bet your last toad charm on one thing—and that is, when you start to chop up little kids and I hear of it, I'll stop it if I can. I haven't a thing against you, personally, but I must say I think you were brought up wrong."

Another and fiercer altercation took place among the negroes, at this time, to put an end to our conversation; and, as peace was once more restored by the queen, a tall, hooded figure stalked majestically into the cavern and stood at the other side of the table, in front of Joan, with folded arms.

"Welcome to our feast!" cried the queen, in tones more respectful than I had ever heard her use. "Be seated with us, Dumb Brother. We welcome you."

The stranger bowed, and silently took seat in front of us. During the remainder of the meal, I felt his eyes peering steadily at me from beneath bushy brows. He was a man of perhaps fifty, with a face scarred by smallpox, as nearly as I could discern; but he kept his hood so far over his eyes, and his chin so deeply buried in the folds of his gown, that it was impossible to gain a fair view of his features. Once, I tried to engage him in conversation; but, as he only shook his head, I came to the conclusion that he was, indeed, without power of speech. He partook of but little refreshment, only occasionally tasting a banana, and did not touch the liquors.

Old Papaloi and Mamanloi kept the crimson flame behind us burning to the end of the meal. As the last of the meats disappeared, the queen

arose from her seat and stretched her arms out over her people.

"The time has come," she cried, "when the children of the mountain shall drive the Spaniards from Gabrielle. Too long have they been allowed to kill our people; too long have we been faint-hearted. We must strike at once, or suffer the anger of Father Mountain. Even as we wait, like cowards, the sacred fires in our father's heart are being kindled. A few more days, and he will send them to sweep us into the sea. Is that not so, Father Mountain?"

A deep rumble came from the bowels of the earth in direct answer to the queen, and I felt my blood go chill at the omen. Surely, this awful woman must have command over the sleeping volcano; for did it not speak when she willed? Had it not been silent, and then, at her command, had it not replied?

"It is so, O queen. Kill the Spanish devils!" shrieked the drunken negroes.

Machetes, daggers, and firearms were again drawn and brandished in air. A score of the blacks began a diabolical dance at the end of the cave, the women joining with the men in performing wild gyrations, keeping time, the while, with an uncanny Carib song.

"What must we do to turn away our father's anger?" cried the queen.

"Give him blood!" screamed Papaloi and Mamanloi.

"Whose blood?"

"White man's blood!" yelled priest and priestess.

"What else do Papaloi and Mamanloi read in the signs from the mountain?" asked the queen.

"The signs say that Joan of Lazarre must take a mate," spoke the old man. "Father Mountain says she must not give the blood sacrifices alone."

"Whom shall she marry?" asked the queen.

"A white man, not of the evil Spanish blood," replied the priestess. "One who has not been long in the land."

"Then here I choose!" cried the yellow woman, suddenly turning upon me, and again throwing her snakelike arm about my neck. "This fair-headed man shall be the lord of Joan of Lazarre. To-day we saved him from the Spanish devils. To-morrow he will help us destroy them all."

I struggled to my feet, anger, dismay, disgust, humiliation, and amazement struggling for expression. My throat seemed to be paralyzed, and I could not speak above a whisper. But I shook

my head with all the determination and emphasis that I could put into such primitive action.

"Then you love another!" she cried, her voice shrilling with anger. "You love the doll-faced daughter of the bearded American."

"If you know everything, why ask for light from me?" I cried. "I do love another, and I intend to marry her, if I live."

The moment after, I wished that I had torn out my tongue before uttering those words.

"You shall live, but you shall never marry her!" cried the Yellow Queen, rising to her feet, and striking the table a blow with her clenched fist. "You shall not marry her, because you shall marry me to-morrow, and she shall be here to witness the ceremony. I shall send for her."

"I will not marry you, and she will not come at your bidding," I retorted, now half beside myself with rage. "And, what is more, I give you warning that you had best leave all American citizens alone. We are not harming you, and you will regret the day that you laid hands on any of us. Don't think you are playing with poor, old crippled Spain."

The queen laughed shrilly. "I care not for America," she cried, snapping her fingers disdainfully. "Let them come with their soldiers,

and Father Mountain will burn them up; let them come by the thousands, and the sea shall swallow them. What Joan of Lazarre says, she means. She will marry you to-morrow, Fair Hair; and the pale-cheeked girl at the Hotel Madrid shall be here to dance at the wedding. I will send the dog-man for her; and, after we are married, the dog-man shall have her."

"What!" I cried, in horror. "You will do nothing of the sort. You cannot get her, anyway; for the soldiers of the governor-general are guarding the hotel, and your evil messenger will only meet his death."

"Did the messenger I sent to the last governor-general fail me?" sneered the queen. "'Go to St. Croix,' I said to him, 'and strangle his excellency in his bed.' Did the guards and the doors and the bolts save his clean throat? His faithful sentinels found him, the next morning, with his eyes open and his tongue out of his mouth."

"Did the messenger fail that I sent to the prosecutor and the chief judge, and to Colonel Aguilas? To-morrow, after our wedding, I will send for General Bolero; for I hear that he is like to lose his wits from fear. I wish him to possess all his little brains when he faces the god of the mountain. So, you see, Joan of Lazarre makes no

threats she cannot fulfill. She will have the doll-faced girl here in time for the wedding, and the dog-man who gets her for me shall have her as his reward."

"What has the poor girl done to you?" I cried, in desperation. "She has never harmed a living being. Surely, you cannot have the heart to do such a terrible deed as that. What you do to me is of little consequence. Have mercy on that innocent child."

"Innocent child—faugh!" cried the queen. "She is no child, who can rob Joan of Lazarre of the love she demands. She is a woman grown, with all a woman's wiles and tricks; and she shall pay in full for winning that which is Joan's by right. If she will not live with the dog-man after she is married to him, she shall be given as a sacrifice to Father Mountain. But the dog-man shall have her first."

"But she does not love me—she loves another!" I exclaimed, hoping by this plea to change the cruel woman's mind.

"But you love her?"

I stammered a denial.

"The blood in your temples betrays you, and proves you a liar. It also seals her fate."

"Have a care!" cried Larry. "That girl is the

daughter of the American consul, a powerful official; and, if you harm her, a thousand soldiers will be sent to wipe out Voodooism as with a sponge."

"France sent her legions to Santo Domingo and Gabrielle three hundred years ago," retorted the queen. "They too, came to 'sweep Voodooism into the sea.' What became of those soldiers? They did not return to France. But Voodooism survived. I have decided, I tell you. The man with bark like a dog shall get the girl." With that, she clapped her hands, and uttered a sharp command in a guttural tongue.

As she finished speaking, the hideous, hairy monster at the other end of the table arose to his feet, displayed his white tusks in a frightful grin, and slunk from the cave.

As with one impulse, Larry and I leaped to our feet. Before we could take a stride toward the entrance—before we could put hand on pistol grip—we were surrounded by a swarm of blacks, were thrown to the rocky floor of the cavern, and, within the space of half a minute, found ourselves tied hand and foot. Larry swore a string of oaths that would have incited a mob to violence in any white man's country, but neither the queen nor her followers paid the slightest attention to his tirade.

"If we could only get some word to the Pier-sons!" I exclaimed. "They might be prepared for the yellow woman's messenger."

"Perhaps the dumb monk will carry a message for us," suggested Larry; but the words were scarcely out of his mouth before he uttered an exclamation of dismay.

The dumb monk was gone.

Neither of us had seen the mysterious stranger leave; and, as the queen at that moment issued an order which sent a score of blacks running from the cave, I believe that his sudden disappearance caused her some uneasiness, too.

"God grant that he has gone to warn them!" I exclaimed; and Larry added: "Amen to that."

The negroes kept up their drinking for an hour or two after we had been made prisoners; and, long after the final vestige of meat had disappeared, they continued gnawing the bones and sucking the dregs of the rum crocks. The number of drunken forms upon the floor increased; and, being no longer fed by the old priest and priestess, the fire at our backs died down to a long bed of smoldering embers, which sent up only infrequent red flames, to fill the corners of the cave with splotches of blood.

Finally, the Yellow Queen herself prepared to

retire. "You shall learn to love me," she said, leaning over and placing her hot cheek against mine. "You shall drink of a love potion that will make you forget the world, and remember only Joan. Good night, my king, my lord—good night."

She went to a far corner of the cave, and I could see her there, outstretched in the dim light cast by the flickering torches. For two hours, I watched her fearfully, not daring to go to sleep. I could see, or thought I could see, her eyes shining through the gloom like the fiery orbs of a tiger, waiting for his prey to close its eyes. At last, sheer exhaustion forced my eyelids shut.

Larry was kicking me with his pinioned feet when I again returned to consciousness. "Be aisy and quiet," he whispered, as I opened my eyes, "and push that machete over this way."

By the light of the dying fire, I could make out the shape of a long-bladed knife near my feet. With infinite caution, lest I make a noise that would bring the negroes upon me, I pushed it over in Larry's direction. It finally reached a point where he could make use of it; and, in the course of another minute, he had managed to cut the bonds that held his hands. Then he released his feet, and crawled stealthily over to my side.

"The whole bunch is asleep," he whispered, as he went to work to free me. "Now is our chance to make our break for the open."

"But the queen is watching us," I objected, with the memory of those terrible eyes still burning into my brain.

"Not so that you can notice it," he replied, with confidence. "I've been watching her; and she's been asleep, good and sound, for more than an hour. We can crawl and roll out of this place, just as easy as you please."

"Suppose they wake?" I asked.

"Then it may be a case of fight," he replied. "But a quiet getaway beats spilling blood, every time. Hello! What's this?"

Uttering a suppressed exclamation of surprise, Larry picked a piece of white paper from the floor.

"It's got writing on it," he continued, as he tried to read it. "But I'm hanged if I can make it out. We'll look it over later. In the meantime, say good night to your yellow lady friend, and let's get a move on."

Alternately rolling and crawling, we made for the entrance, and had almost reached the goal when, unluckily, my hand fell upon the upturned face of a sleeping black man. His jaws closed

like a steel trap; and, as his teeth met in the fleshy part of my hand, I uttered an exclamation of pain.

My cry was echoed by a dozen screeches—one, high pitched above the rest, coming from the Yellow Queen, whom we could see dashing toward us through the gloom.

Larry and I leaped to our feet, and ran with all speed for the entrance. Two black men arose, to block our flight, and we dropped them with blows of our fists. Several pistol shots were fired in our direction, but all went wild; and we dashed, unharmed, out of the cave.

A dozen negroes, carrying torches, staggered out of the cavern in our wake; but all were stupid from drink and sleep, and we were soon able to leave them far behind. The Yellow Queen, probably the only sober one in the crew, followed us for a few hundred yards, with arms waving and voice uplifted; but she was no match for us as endurance runners, and soon fell hopelessly to the rear.

To put our enemies as far behind us as possible, we kept up a brisk pace for a quarter of an hour, before we sat down for a rest.

“Now, what on earth shall we do?” I asked, as the discouragement of our position suddenly

overwhelmed me. "I suppose we've got to make for St. Croix with all possible speed, dangerous as such a proceeding will be?"

"We sure have," agreed Larry. "We've got to go and save that little girl from the dog-man, or die in the trying. Damn his skin! I'll bet the next time I plant a bullet in him, he'll know he's been hit."

"We might go into town disguised as Spaniards," I suggested.

"Or we might go to some second-hand store and buy an old sailor's suit or two. We might make up as pretty good Dutch sailors, don't you think?"

"You'd make a fine Dutch sailor, with that map of Ireland that you're carrying about," I laughed.

"Oh, by the way," exclaimed Larry, beginning of a sudden to search his pockets, "I think I'll take a peep at that bit of paper that I found back there in the cave."

He found the white slip, and I held a match over his shoulder while he read it.

"It's English, or I'm a lobster!" he cried; then he whistled softly, and handed the paper to me, lighting a match in his turn, so that I might read the following message:

"You will find her at the House on Stilts."

CHAPTER XI

THE HOUSE ON STILTS

LARRY and I stared blankly at each other through the gloom.

“Why!” I cried. “The House on Stilts is the—”

“The monastery of the dumb monks!” he exclaimed, finishing the sentence for me.

“How the mischief could she get there?” I asked, my brain in a whirl of perplexity over the strange turn of affairs.

“Easy enough,” replied Sullivan briskly. “It’s just as transparent as glass. Old Brother Mum, at the feast in the cave, wrote the message to us. He saw the way things were going, and beat a quiet sneak to the door when no one was looking, and got away unnoticed during the excitement. He must have had a quarter of an hour’s start of the dog-man; and, as he probably knows the mountain paths just as well, if not better, he will beat him to the hotel. Dumb as he is, he’ll prob-

ably be able to convince the general and Mrs. Pierson that the safest place for the girl is in the monastery. Once inside the House on Stilts, all the Voodoos in the West Indies couldn't get her; and she'll be as safe as if she were in the White House at Washington."

"I hope your theory is correct," I said doubtfully.

"It isn't a theory at all—it's a fact," retorted Larry. "I haven't been on the detective force for five years for nothing. Now, it's a case of hike to the House on Stilts for us. We haven't any business at St. Croix yet a while. I judge you'd like to see a certain young lady before doing anything else."

"You're a good judge, Larry," I replied gratefully.

Neither of us knew the exact location of the House on Stilts; and all that we had to guide us at first was the vague direction of "over yonder," or "up in the mountains," that we had heard since our arrival on the island. But we knew the general direction in which the monastery lay, and set off north by west.

The stars and the moon guided our footsteps quite clearly; and, after walking an hour or more through the region of stunted pines, we struck a

well-defined trail which, luckily, led in the direction we wished to take, and we made more rapid progress.

We trudged on until morning; and as the sun blazed over the hills, we met a native who agreed to guide us to a point whence we could view the monastery. It is not my purpose to lead you over the toilsome path we followed all that day. Suffice it to say, that, an hour before the sun dropped over the smoking crest of Mont Lazarre, we came to the edge of a valley which brought us in sight of the House on Stilts.

The valley was, possibly, three miles across; and the monastery, situated at the other side, looked like a doll's house on straws. Its walls and gables, glistening in the slant rays of the sun, showed white as marble against the black bulk of the cliff, that rose hundreds of feet above its roof. The timbers supporting the house against the wall of rock had their footing in the dense jungle at the mountain's base. Even at that distance, the monastery looked large enough to house an army.

"So far, so good, Menelik," said Larry, addressing the black guide, as the latter stopped short. "Why don't you go ahead?"

The negro shook his head. "Valley belong to

Sun God and men without tongues," he said. "Yellow Queen's people—him no go there."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Larry. "So there are other spook raisers on the island besides your old yellow girl? Well, if you quit, you quit, I suppose. Still, as long as you've brought us within sight of the bungalow we're looking for, I guess I'll have to pay you off, and let you go."

The guide was paid, and quickly slipped out of sight on the back trail. Larry and I then plunged into the valley.

It proved to be a longer walk than either of us had imagined; and it was rapidly growing dark when we toiled up the narrow pathway leading to the cliff, against which was propped the house of mystery. We had encountered no one on our journey through the valley; and, as we now looked upward at the monastery, we could detect no sign of life about its silent walls.

No smoke rose from its roof, and no sound came down from its inner regions. It seemed still as the tomb, and, had we not known that the black shadow we were regarding had been placed there by human hands, we might well have believed it part of the dark cliff that towered above us. As nearly as we could estimate, the monastery was planted on a platform fully two hundred feet

above the ground. It was a two-story structure, provided with numerous windows and gables, and was a rectangle of about two hundred feet long by fifty feet wide.

After we had quenched our thirst from a bubbling stream which poured from the base of the cliff, we surveyed our surroundings, with a view to reaching the monastery.

Larry shook his head dubiously. "Were you ever a sailor?" he asked.

"I sailed across the Gulf," I replied.

"Well," he continued, "unless you're a mighty fine climber, I don't see how you are ever going to shin up those big posts."

"They'll be hard climbing," I replied, "for they're bigger than telegraph poles."

"It looks plumb hopeless to me," decided Sullivan, after we had walked the entire length of the forest of posts, and had examined every one, in the vain hope of finding a ladder. All the posts were smooth as the wear of years could make them, and, until they reached a point sixty feet above our heads, where the first crosspieces were laid, offered not the slightest foothold for a climber.

"Hello—hello!" cried Larry, at last. "Monastery ahoy! Hello!"

His voice was echoed back from some far-distant rock, but no sign came from the abode above.

"I guess the house is for rent," said Larry, in disgust. "Guess we'll have to go downtown and see the agent, to get the keys."

As we stood peering up at the black block above, a smaller fragment of darkness seemed to separate itself from the mass and come gradually toward the earth.

Larry saw the thing at the same time that I did, but was evidently equally at a loss for an explanation.

When the object had descended to a point some thirty feet above the earth, we saw that it was a boatswain's swing chair. When it settled to the ground, we found that it was suspended by a chain of brass.

"Hello, up there!" cried Larry, as the chair came to a stop and the chain tightened. "Do you want us to come up? Shall we get in?"

No reply came to his question. Only the echoes answered mockingly from the distant cliff.

"They're evidently not wasting words on strangers, up there," observed Larry. "But then, come to think of it, how can they, if they're dumb? If we get up there, we'll have one consolation—we'll

not be talked to death, no matter what else may happen to us."

"Shall we get in?" I asked, dubiously surveying the chair, which now swung a couple of feet from the ground.

"Sure," replied Sullivan. "You'll never be h'isted by an elevator when you're outside of it."

"But there's scarcely room for two," I objected, the coward within me prompting the words. "Besides that, it doesn't seem to me as if the chain was very strong."

"That's true," he assented briskly, seating himself in the chair. "I really don't believe it would lift more than a ton." Then he called aloft: "Hey, up there—heave ahead! All set."

There came no answering call from above; but, slowly, the brass links strained, a faint creaking was heard aloft, and Larry began to ascend through the gloom.

"Good-by, old fellow!" I cried, as his figure was lost in the darkness overhead. "I'll join you next trip. Sing out when you get to the top."

"Don't know if they allow singing in that church up there, but I'll holler, anyway," he replied.

The three or four minutes that elapsed before I heard his voice again seemed an hour. With

the regularity of clockwork, there sounded the creaking of the windlass that was hauling up the chair; and from afar off in the jungle came the fretful, querulous cry of some creature—but whether human, beast, or fowl, I could not determine. High above the hills beyond the valley towered the cone of Mont Lazarre, still faintly gray from the last efforts of the sun. The smoke from the volcano rose heavenward in the breathless air; and so black it was, and so sharply defined against the lighter sky, that it looked like another mountain, inverted and balanced over the crater.

“All right, up here.” Larry’s welcome tones came floating down from the great height.

It seemed another age before the bo’s’n’s chair descended again.

I seated myself, and cried, in tones as brave as I could muster: “Heave away!”

The chair tightened; my feet swung clear of the ground; and I gripped the links on either side, shutting my eyes, meanwhile, to hide the sight of the lowering treetops and the deepening chasm. The creaking sound above my head grew louder and louder, and I began counting, to distract my mind from my body’s peril. Once, when I took a momentary glance at my surroundings, I almost fainted to find the chair whirling and swinging.

The view of crisscrossed beams on one side and yawning space on the other made me sick; and I began to count once more, with a frantic resolve not to lose my presence of mind and relinquish my hold on the chains. I had reached three hundred in this desperate attempt to regain my mental poise, when a cheery voice, almost at my elbow, exclaimed:

“Fine and dandy! You are a sailor, after all.”

Opening my eyes, I found that the chair was swinging three feet above what appeared to be the dooryard of the monastery. It was considerably lighter than it had been down below, and I could easily make out a low fence running round the border of the inclosure. The last glimmer of twilight faintly outlined the walls and openings of the structure, and revealed above my head the shape of a huge crane, which had swung my chair clear from the chasm and over the monastery yard.

Larry and I were the only persons within the inclosure.

“Where are the monks?” I asked, in wonderment; for I had expected to find a numerous company of the silent brotherhood.

“You can search me; I haven’t any of ’em con-

cealed in my pocket," replied Larry. "You see now as much as I've seen. When I landed, the old apparatus up there started itself going again, went down after you, brought you up—and here we are."

"We must find Norelle," I exclaimed. "As far as we are concerned, we are evidently safe enough, for the present; but we are not so sure about her."

"If she's here, you bet we'll find her," replied Larry. "All there is to do is to hunt."

But we soon discovered, to our keen disappointment, that our search was to be bounded by very narrow limits. Opening upon the yard at the front of the house were six doors, and all but one of these were closed against us.

Entering the only open door, Larry struck a match, and revealed a small apartment, possibly twelve feet square, containing nothing but two bunks. There was a door leading from this room into the interior of the monastery, but it was shut and fastened securely on the other side.

At first, Larry was for attacking this door with the machete he had brought from the Voodoo cave, but he abandoned the notion at the first stroke upon the solid wood. "I might work a week without making an impression upon this door!" he exclaimed, in disgust.

"The only thing to do is to wait for daylight, unless we return to the earth by the way we came," I said.

"We'll do well at that job," replied Larry. "The fellows that run the elevator have moved it out of reach and shut down the power."

Sullivan was right. The crane had picked up the bo's'n's chair again; and now it hung suspended over the abyss, far beyond the reach of our hands. Even supposing that we could have laid hold of the chair, we could have done nothing with it, without control of the unseen mechanism which caused the drum to turn and pay out or take in the chain.

"I don't know when I've felt so much like a weak, sick kitten," exclaimed Larry bitterly. "Here we are, like helpless children, crying to be let into the house, and nobody will come to open the door! Why, any second-story worker ought to turn the trick, or get out of the business."

"We might get into one of the second-story windows," I suggested.

"Yes, we might, if we had a ladder and an axe," growled Sullivan. "If you'll find the ladder and chopper, I'll do the rest."

We made another trip around the building, trying each door, and finding them all as unyielding

as the rock against which the monastery was built.

"They evidently want these two kids to be good and go to bed early," cried Larry, in disgust, after we had exhausted all our ingenuity in vain efforts to enter the forbidden doors. "I give up. I'm beat, and I admit it."

"Things will look better by daylight," I said, more hopefully than I felt.

"Or worse," added Sullivan.

"But Norelle!" I exclaimed. "What about her? Is she safe here at the monastery, under the protection of the monks; or is it possible that she is even now being dragged through the jungle by that hideous creature of the Voodoo queen? Perhaps it would have been better had we remained to protect her from the queen."

"Huh!" retorted Larry, in scorn. "A fine sample of protection we could have given her. They handled us like babies—the two babes in the wood that we are!"

"I know I'll not be able to sleep, from worrying about her," I said.

"Don't make a fool of yourself," he answered. "You just will sleep, too. It won't do the girl a bit of good to sit up all night, tearing your hair and moaning about her. What you want to do is

to turn in and get a good night's sleep, so that you can put up a good fight for her to-morrow, if a fight is needed."

"That sounds like pretty good advice," I said, "and I guess I'll try to follow it. But when the girl you love is in danger—is perhaps being done to death, or suffering tortures worse than death—I tell you, it drives Mr. Sleep away."

"I know that," said Larry sympathetically. "But you'll find, after a while, that the girl is all right. In fact, I've come to the conclusion that things in life are never quite as bad or quite as good as you think they're going to be."

Just before turning in for the night, I looked out of the door, and was startled to observe several dark, motionless figures upon the fence surrounding the yard.

"Look!" I cried, in dismay. "Look over there! Are those some of the monks?"

Together, we approached for closer inspection.

"They're turkeys gone to roost," said Larry, when we got within ten feet of the nearest silent form. "I've a good notion to spear one of them with my knife, so as to be sure of a good breakfast."

"Don't—for Heaven's sake, don't!" I cried, in terror. "They're not turkeys at all. Don't you

see that they are vultures of some hideous breed? If you molested one of them, the whole flock might attack us, and there are enough of them to put up a nasty fight."

"Guess you're right, Jack," said Larry. "I can see more than a dozen of them now, and they all look as though they needed a square meal."

It was with more than one shudder of dread that I threw myself upon the couch in that strange room. As I tried to pierce the gloom of my surroundings, I imagined that I could see the evil eyes of the loathsome birds glaring at me from the threshold. I seemed to hear the rustle of their huge wings as they beat the air, and could detect the odor of carrion flesh that reeked from their cruel talons and hooked beaks.

I awoke with a start. The moon was shining through the doorway, full upon my face. A dark figure, gowned and hooded, stood beside my bed.

"Who are you?" I cried, so startled that I could feel the cold perspiration come to my forehead.

The dark figure made no answer, but glided silently and swiftly through the door.

I jumped to my feet, and ran out of the building.

No one was in sight. The moonlight bathed the monastery yard and walls with almost the

brilliance of day. The only living things in view were the hideous vultures, perched like sentries along the fence.

"What's the matter, Jack?" asked Larry, in sleepy tones, from within.

"The monk!" I cried, reëntering the apartment. "He was here just a moment ago. Then he vanished. Didn't you see him?"

"No, I didn't, and I don't believe you did," replied Larry peevishly. "You're dreaming things. Go to bed."

CHAPTER XII

IN THE COPPER CAVERNS

DAWN was creeping into the doorway, and the sound of shuffling feet fell upon my ear, when I once more became conscious of things. Shadowy forms were passing and repassing in the monastery yard.

"Our hosts are early risers," remarked Larry, who was already awake and sitting up in his bunk.

"Who—the monks?" I asked.

"Who do you suppose—the New York fire department?" he retorted. "They've been out there these fifteen minutes, cutting figure eights and playing with the chickens. I've got an idea, Jack, that we've landed in a bughouse."

It was, indeed, a remarkable sight that greeted our eyes, as we peered through the open doorway. The big wooden platform held some one hundred and fifty of the monks, all gowned and hooded

like the one who had been at the Voodoo feast, and the one whom I had seen in the moonlight. They were marching round and round, waving their arms in the air; and whenever they reached the outer, or eastern, side of the inclosure, they made low bows to the rising sun.

The ceremony was conducted by one whose great age was evidenced by feeble steps, and by the snow-white beard which fell to his knees.

Circling over the heads of the monks was the flock of vultures that we had seen roosting on the fence the night before. The great birds swooped down, one by one, to receive pieces of raw meat which the white-bearded monk doled out to them from a basket. As each vulture received his portion, he flapped his wide wings, wheeled a few times in the air above the monastery, and sailed majestically away.

As the last bird was fed, the sun burst in full glory over the smoke-capped crest of Mont Lazarre, and all the monks prostrated themselves in the dust. They remained thus for the space of a minute, and then, at a signal from the high priest, who was the first to rise, reformed in line, marched three times around the yard, and filed into the monastery through one of the doors that had been closed to us, the night before.

After his followers had gone, the venerable monk came toward the door of our chamber, and, reaching a point five or six feet beyond the threshold, stood with folded arms, as though waiting for us to come out. Accepting the hint, we approached him; and he bowed with the greatest dignity, spreading out his hands toward the monastery, as though to indicate that we were welcome.

"Good morning, sir," said Larry, in Spanish. "We hope you are well this fine day."

The monk bowed and smiled.

"We came in search of a young lady," I said, coming directly to the subject uppermost in my mind. "May we see her?"

The old monk shook his head.

"If not now, when?" I asked.

Once more he shook his head; and, as he shrugged his shoulders, my heart sank.

"Surely, she is here!" I cried.

For the third time, he gave the negative sign.

"But she is expected!" I cried, in an agony of apprehension. "Oh, tell me, reverend sir, that she is expected! Surely, you must have some tidings of her? You know her whereabouts, and she is safe?"

This time, to my great joy, he bowed his head.

I could have embraced him for the load he lifted from my heart.

Then, Norelle was safe with friends! Of that I could feel assured. The good monks had her under their protection somewhere; and I had but to possess my soul in patience for a little while, and we would meet again.

While we were standing thus, another member of the brotherhood approached, and remained with eyes bent upon the ground until our interview was ended. The elder monk then indicated that we were to accompany the newcomer.

Bidding farewell to the aged man, we followed the younger into the monastery, and entered a passageway which led to an apartment situated at the far end of the building. In this room we found a table spread with an appetizing display of fruit, grain cakes of some sort, honey, and milk. The monk invited us to partake of the edibles, and left the room as we took our places at the table.

"They're not planning to starve us to death, that's one thing certain," said Larry cheerfully. "As long as they feed me as well as this, I'll not admit they're loony, even though they do funny stunts with the buzzards."

We made a hearty meal; and when the monk

returned, half an hour later, we were quite ready to take a more optimistic view of life. Our guide then took us on a tour of the monastery building, and a very interesting place it proved to be.

I had expected to be shown great halls of worship, relics of hoary antiquity, and, possibly, gods graven in stone and ivory and gold; but the house seemed, for the most part, to consist of sleeping apartments, provided with bunks similar to those upon which we had slept. Stranger still, there were no monks to be found about the building. All the members of that great crew, whom earlier in the day we had seen worshipping the sun, had apparently vanished into thin air.

The only apartment not used as a bedchamber, save the dining room in which we ourselves had eaten breakfast, was filled with a collection of manuscripts. This room—the library, I took it to be—was located in one of the gables of the building; and the great window which gave it light overshot the lower floor so far that it was flush with the outside fence of the inclosure. Thus one might have dropped a pebble from the window to the ground, two hundred feet below.

The walls of the library were provided with rows of shelves, reaching from floor to ceiling.

These shelves were nearly all filled with parchments, many of which were bound in brass, after the form of our volumes nowadays, while hundreds of others were contained in copper cylinders.

Reclining upon a couch, near the big window, was the only monk we had encountered in our inspection of the building. Him I took to be the librarian; for, when we entered, he arose, bowed courteously, and waved his hand, as though to make us welcome. Cordial enough though his smile appeared to be, there was about the man something that I did not like.

His face was dark, almost, as a negro's; and his large, hooked nose and piercing black eyes lent to his countenance a look of cruelty which struck me as unpleasant in the extreme.

He very politely showed us a number of the manuscripts. Many of these, I was surprised to find, were in Spanish; but the great majority were limned in a character which I could not read and did not even know by name. Many of the brass-bound books were handsomely embellished with illuminated script.

After we had visited all the rooms in the monastery, our guide conducted us along a hallway which brought us to a door built into the face of

the cliff. This door he opened, revealing, to our amazement, a tunnel hewn out of the solid rock of the mountain.

Imagine a great passageway, with arched ceiling, extending into the cliff as far as the eye could reach, and illuminated with myriads of brass lamps, planted at intervals of twenty-five or thirty feet. From the number of lights, which sparkled back into the mountain until they looked no larger than the stars of the Milky Way, I judged that the tunnel was several miles in length.

"Well, this beats the Mammoth Cave!" exclaimed Larry, in admiration. "I'm glad I did not have the contract of digging out the rock."

We started down the tunnel at a brisk pace, and, at the end of twenty minutes, came to an octagonal chamber, fully one hundred feet in diameter, and half as high again to its groined ceiling. This great cathedral, at first sight, seemed to be peopled by a throng of monks; but, upon nearer view, the figures proved to be bronze statuary.

All the figures save one were kneeling, and faced a raised platform in the centre, upon which, with his arms outstretched in a protecting manner over the throng, was the form of another monk. Although he was dressed in the same garb

as the kneeling figures, this monk was of heroic stature; and, over his head, suspended by a wire, was poised a bronze vulture, with wings outstretched.

There must have been at least three hundred of the kneeling bronzes grouped around the central figure; and, as I came upon this strange assemblage without warning, a most uncanny feeling clutched my heart.

Larry evidently felt it, too; for he exclaimed: "Of all the rum sights I ever saw, this beats the bunch!" Then he turned to our guide, and asked: "Are these the statues of your departed brethren?"

The young monk nodded his head.

"They are lifelike enough to be the dead themselves," I exclaimed, as I approached for a closer view of the kneeling figures.

As though divining my wish, the monk tapped one of the statues lightly on the forehead, and indicated that we might do likewise. A closer examination revealed the fact that each face contained its lines of individuality.

"They are the dead themselves!" I exclaimed.

The monk nodded in acquiescence.

"In short, they are marvelous pieces of copper plate," said Larry, in an awestruck whisper.



"ARE THESE THE STATUES OF YOUR DEPARTED BRETHREN?"

"They must have some wonderful process of electroplating the bodies," I suggested.

"I take it that the one in the centre of the group was the founder or patron saint of the order," said Larry, looking at the guide.

To this the young monk agreed, with an inclination of his head.

We had just time to note the fact that from the other sides of the octagonal chamber radiated tunnels similar to the one we had traversed from the monastery, when our guide led the way into one of them. We had proceeded for possibly half a mile along the lamplit way, when we heard the ring of hammers on metal. The din grew louder, as though we were approaching a huge boiler shop; and, suddenly, a sharp turn in the tunnel brought us to the scene of activity.

It was the monks' foundry. Glowing furnaces, puffing bellows, and monstrous hammers were at work in a room that must have measured one hundred feet from side to side. Brethren of the order, to the number of sixty or seventy, were engaged about the shop; and as the forges, melting pots, and great, glowing ingots of metal threw out an intense heat, I was not surprised to observe that all the smiths were stripped to the waist.

There may have been other metals in the pots

or on the anvils, but I saw none but copper and brass in the hands of the workmen, who were fashioning all sorts of implements of offense and defense, and of everyday use. Cooking utensils, swords, hoes, axes, spears, brackets for lamps, hinges for doors, shields, helmets, hammers, plates, sickles, chains—in fact, a wondrous array of things was being made by the silent brothers.

Three or four of the monks acted evidently as foremen; for they were not handling the metal themselves, but were here, there, and everywhere, directing the others.

I should willingly have lingered for hours in that interesting place, but our guide was evidently bent on showing us other sights; so we hurried on. From the copper shop, we proceeded to a third tunnel, where we found another gang of workmen engaged in mining the copper ore.

The mountain was evidently wonderfully rich in this useful metal—so rich, in fact, that the monks were able to dig a definite system of tunnels, and, at the same time, to be rewarded with the precious copper at every step of the work. I doubt if the Montana hills or the lake region of Michigan could produce an equal quantity or quality of copper.

A journey through a fourth tunnel brought us

to the bakeshop and kitchen, while the fifth, sixth, and seventh revealed the looms on which their cloth was woven; the joiners' shop, where the workers in wood made tables, chairs, and other articles of daily need; and the tailors' quarters, where cloth and leather were fashioned into things of wear.

"It's a wonderful city!" exclaimed Larry admiringly, after we had left the seventh hive of industry. "The only thing I regret is that we have not seen them copper-plate the dear departed."

"Horrible!" I cried, with a shudder. "I wouldn't see it done for a farm."

"Well, I would," retorted Larry, "because I want to learn the secret, and take it back to the States. It beats our burial system all hollow. Just think how nice it would be to have your copper-plated ancestors assisting at a reception? They would give an 'air' to the function that no amount of vulgar wealth could hope to touch."

"Oh, shut up!" I exclaimed, in disgust.

"Why not?" continued Larry, with fiendish enthusiasm. "If you didn't care about showing off great-grandfather and grandfather, you could have them put snugly away in a spare bedroom. And then, think how neatly you could even up

scores with those ancestors you did not like. The old fellows who had squandered the money that you should have inherited, or who disgraced the family by marrying the cook—you could square accounts with them by dumping them in the coal bin, or planting them out in front as hitching posts. Oh, I tell you, there's no limit to the possibilities of the scheme. If you became rich, you could give your forefathers a coat of silver plate over the copper; and, if you joined the real plutocrat class, you could gold-plate 'em. And every coat of metal you gave them would make 'em more durable and weatherproof."

Our guide was evidently shocked at Larry's gruesome levity; for he scowled fiercely, and held up his hand warningly, as though to stop the Irishman's tongue. But Larry either did not observe the sign, or did not care, for he continued glibly:

"Second-hand dealers would do a rushing business in ancestral antiques; and it would be only a question of time when the department stores would be advertising bargain sales in gold, silver, and copper-plated ancestors."

With an inarticulate cry of rage, the monk sprang at Larry, and landed a heavy blow upon his neck.

Had the blow found the point of the jaw, an

inch or two higher, my detective friend would have been down and out; for the monk was of generous build, and owned a fist like a ham. As it was, Larry was little the worse for the blow, and came back at his dumb antagonist, hammer and tongs. A very pretty battle was in prospect; for they were about evenly matched as to height and reach, and, I judged, as to age.

But I rushed in between them, at the imminent risk of my own features, crying: "Stop—stop!

"Now, you apologize to our friend," I said to Larry, after I had broken them apart. "You should have had more sense than to talk like that about the dead, right here in the tomb of the brotherhood. I'm ashamed of you. If you haven't any respect for the memory of your fathers, others have. Our guide was right. You deserve a licking."

At first, Larry glared at me like a tiger at bay. "I've a good notion to teach you a little lesson, son," he began fiercely. But at the next moment his old-time, sunny smile broke out, and he held out his hands to both of us. "I'll take back everything I said," he exclaimed. "I really meant no harm at all, at all. It was all a joke—indeed it was. Will you forgive me, sir, for offending you?"

The look of loathing with which the monk had been regarding Larry gradually disappeared; and he, too, smiled as he took the proffered hand.

The awkward situation ended there and then; for at that moment came the clanging of a deep-toned bell—then another, and another, until the caverns were resounding as if all the fire alarms in a big city had been turned loose together.

A gasping, choking cry came from the tongueless mouth of our guide, and he seized my hand, to start full speed in the direction of the octagonal chamber.

Sullivan followed close upon our heels; and, as we raced along, we were soon joined by other monks. The bells kept up their clangor, and in the far distance somewhere I heard a series of shots or explosions.

“Must be a fire,” yelled Larry.

Through the chamber of kneeling statues we dashed with the running throng of coppersmiths, bakers, miners, and other craftsmen, and then started down the tunnel that led to the monastery. We were quite breathless when we reached the end of the passageway, and rushed pell-mell out into the light of day.

The great inclosure of the monastery was crowded with monks. Those on the side of the

yard nearest the house were rolling huge stones and lumps of ore toward their brethren on the outer edge, while the latter, who were near the fence, were lifting and hurling the heavy missiles into the abyss.

“What’s the matter?” I cried, looking upon the strange scene with bewildered eyes.

“Matter—hell!” vociferated Larry, as he joined the force of stone throwers. “The Voodoos are storming the monastery, that’s all.”

CHAPTER XIII

IN DEFENSE OF THE MONASTERY

FROM far below came a babel of cries, mingled with the sound of gun and pistol shots. Running to the fence, I looked over. I drew back quickly, however, as half a dozen quick reports and a patter of bullets on the fence warned me that every head exposed was a target for the negroes.

Even in the brief glance I had taken, I was able to see that the blacks were in force, and that the Yellow Queen was directing the attack from the two-wheeled cart which she had seized from our Spanish captors. As nearly as I could judge, the rocks and chunks of ore which the monks were hurling to the earth had, thus far, not been very effective. None of the negroes seemed to have been injured or killed, but the missiles served the purpose of keeping the Voodoo people so busy dodging that they found little time in which to inflict any real injury upon the monastery or its occupants.

Half a dozen revolvers and muskets barked at irregular intervals; but, luckily for the defense, the negroes were poor marksmen.

Larry and I hastened to take an active part in the battle, and assisted the monks in throwing fragments of stone and ore over the top of the wooden wall. At Larry's suggestion, I secured an axe, and chopped several holes in the wooden floor of the inclosure, in order to give us lookouts—or, more accurately speaking, "lookdowns" at the enemy.

"This reminds me," said Larry, "of the days when I was a youngster in Kerry Patch, heaving brickbats at the dog catchers."

"But why are they attacking the monastery?" I asked. "I thought there was peace between the Voodoos and the monks."

"Perhaps it was because I have become one of your lodgers." A sweet, familiar voice behind me uttered the words.

Whirling around, I beheld Norelle, and could scarcely believe my eyes.

"You here!" I gasped. "Well, how on earth did you reach this place, and when?"

"I came by the elevator, ten minutes ago," she replied, pointing to the bo's'n's chair swinging from the crane. She spoke as lightly as though

the perilous ascent was of no more moment than a trip by trolley, or a walk around the block at home.

"But the dog-man and the other devilish negroes——" I began.

"Arrived here just three minutes too late to get me," said Norelle, with a nervous little laugh. "My good guide, the brother who does not talk, brought me here by the most direct route; and we had no adventures by the way."

"I am surprised that your father and mother would consent to your coming," I exclaimed.

"The good monk had little difficulty in convincing them that I would be safer here than at the hotel. The whole city of St. Croix is in a state of terror, and almost every one dreams of the Yellow Queen and her plots. But tell me, if you can, why has the Yellow Queen conceived a grudge against me? What have I ever done to her?"

"I do not know," I lied unblushingly, "but have no fears. We will protect you here with our heart's blood."

"You look too pale to spare much just now, Mr. Smith," replied Norelle, with another laugh. Then, her smile vanishing on the instant, she added: "I want no blood shed for me. I did not want to come, and would not have moved a step,

if it had not been for the insistence of father and mother. I saw no reason in it then, and see none in it now. Why is this battle going on? What have I done to be the cause? I never intentionally harmed that woman, or any other human being!"

All of a sudden, she buried her face in her hands, and burst into sobs. I would cheerfully have given five years of my life to have been able, at that moment, to clasp her in my arms, and console her. Yet I dared not.

But Larry, impudent Irishman that he was, had no such delicacy of feeling at all, apparently; for he threw his arm about her in a fatherly way, and drew her into the open door of the monastery. She sobbed more than ever, but made no effort to remove his arm. I followed them into the building, feeling even more wretched, I am sure, than the poor girl herself, although my heart was probably wrung by a different set of emotions.

"There, there, little girl!" exclaimed Larry soothingly. "We are all going to leave this place for good just as soon as we kill off a few more negroes."

"I don't want any of the poor wretches murdered!" wailed Norelle. "I don't want anybody hurt on my account. I just want to leave this horrid island forever. It's no place for white people,

anyway. Oh, papa, papa! Why did you ever come to this dreadful place?" She was now fast approaching the hysterical stage of her grief.

Larry bent over her, and, I think, came very to kissing her. If he had dared such a thing, I am sure I would have brained him on the spot. Instead of doing so, however, he merely stroked her sunny hair, and said:

"You just came down here, little girl, so that you could find out what a brave young champion you have in Jack, here. Now, don't be after getting despondent, mavourneen, for everything is going to pan out all right. We'll have the Voodooos on the run in a jiffy; then we'll fix the business of the thieving governor-general, and we'll sail back home, to be happy ever after, as they say in all the story books."

Here Larry probably observed my black looks, and took pity on me; for at the next moment, he exclaimed:

"Take good care of her, Jack. I've got to get busy and help that talkative crowd out there, or we may have no roof over our heads." Thereupon, he left the room, and I turned to console Norelle.

But think you she needed consoling? Not a bit of it.

"What are you doing here?" she cried, with

flashing eyes, and in a tone of fine scorn. "Why are you hiding in here, when those brave monks and that splendid hero, Larry Sullivan, are fighting for their lives against that mob of inhuman blacks? Are you altogether a coward?"

I bowed, and left the room, feeling like a whipped puppy; for I had little expected such treatment at her hands. She had not acted like that with Larry. She had not called him a coward when he left the fight to comfort her. Women are strange creatures, and Norelle the strangest of the sisterhood.

The noise of battle had waxed louder when I returned to the open. The blacks below had evidently adopted new tactics, and were now trying to break down the stilts which supported the monastery, using the trunks of trees as battering-rams. Fifty or sixty of the negroes would pick up a huge log, and come on with it at full speed, until they brought it against the upright beam with force sufficient to beat down a fortress. But the great uprights were planted so deeply in the ground, and were of such sturdy timber, that they did not yield. Again and again, the wooden hammers were hurled against the posts, and again and again they failed.

"You'll have to do better than that, my heart-

ies," cried Larry, exhorting half a hundred of the enemy, who went sprawling to the ground as they brought another log crashing against a timber.

"That seems to be exactly what they are preparing to do," I said, watching the blacks through one of the loopholes in the floor. "They are now going to try to dig up the posts."

"And some of the scoundrels are making a fire," added Larry. "By heck, it looks as though they might make things interesting for us, after all."

A score of Voodoo men came running over the open space, with bundles of faggots upon their backs. These they heaped around several of the supporting posts; and, in spite of the shower of rocks cast down by the monks, they managed to set the wood ablaze. When they were directly underneath the building, the negroes were, in a large measure, protected from the missiles by the overhang of the structure itself. Only an occasional fragment of ore found a mark; and, realizing that at last they had hit upon a plan which promised our destruction, the negroes set up a shrill shout of triumph.

A dozen red tongues of flame shot upward, and licked the monastery's stilts. It seemed but a

matter of a few minutes when the big timbers themselves would be ignited from the kindling wood at their bases; and, if they burned, the building was, of course, doomed to fall. The new danger at first seemed to paralyze the energy of the defense, and the monks ceased their efforts, to gather piteously around their venerable leader, and, with signs which even we could read, indicate that they believed the battle lost.

"Here!" cried Larry, elbowing his way into the crowd, and addressing himself to the white-bearded leader. "Where's the fire department of this outfit? Water is what we need. Bring on a little of it, and we'll put out that blaze in no time."

His abruptness seemed to inspire the monks with renewed hope, for the venerable brother issued a number of orders, which caused a dozen of the priests to rush into the building; and the rest renewed their attacks upon the black mob below.

Within two or three minutes, the monks who had entered the monastery reappeared, rolling before them several great, copper-hooped hogsheads. Axes were wielded, and the heads of these casks were soon beaten in. Out gushed, not water, but great streams of amber-colored wine or beer.

The liquid flowed in streams over the wooden floor of the inclosure, and, finding the crevices between the boards, as well as the several loopholes we had made, poured through. Spreading as it fell, it descended upon the blazing piles like heavy rain.

"Fine business," cried Larry approvingly. "But what a wicked waste of beer!"

By the time a dozen of the casks had been broached, the fires below were quenched. The negroes set up a howl of rage when they saw their incendiary designs go for naught. Then, with renewed energy, they proceeded to dig like moles around the feet of the supporting timbers.

"They will tear the house down over our heads, in spite of all we can do!" I cried, in despair. "Our only refuge is the tunnel."

"Not by a jugful," replied Sullivan, who stood watching the operations of the blacks. "I have an idea that I'm going to try, if I can get a little help."

Striding over to the side of the venerable high priest, Larry whispered a few words into his ear. The old man had been standing, the picture of dejection, in the corner of the yard; but now, at Larry's first words, he brightened up perceptibly, and issued a number of rapid sign orders to his

followers. Larry ran into the monastery, followed by a score or more of the monks.

In the meantime, Norelle had emerged from the building, and I was overjoyed to see that she had dried her tears. But when she saw me regarding her, she deliberately turned her back—which I took to be a hint that she did not wish to talk with me. I therefore continued to watch the negroes, who were working so far below that they seemed to be little larger than ants.

They had succeeded, by this time, in actually digging to the bottom of one of the big pillars; and, when they had freed its foot of earth, they wound round it the snakelike length of a great vine, torn from the jungle. Seizing hold of either end of this improvised rope, the Voodooos had no difficulty in uprooting the beam. As it toppled and fell, the platform upon which the monastery was built shuddered, as though smitten by a blow.

In vain the monks redoubled their efforts to harass the attacking party; but the overhang of the building acted as an effective shield to the negroes, and few of the shots took effect. When a second and a third of the great posts fell beneath us, despair was written plainly upon the faces of the dumb defenders. Their bravery dur-

ing the battle had been all that any soldiers could have shown. None of them had hesitated at any task assigned by their leader, and all had seemed willing enough to display their forms above the wooden wall, while heaving their ammunition at the enemy.

Not the least marvelous part of the whole affair, to my mind, was the fact that not a word had been spoken except those uttered by Larry, Norelle, and myself. Here were three hundred men, who had been fighting for their lives in silence. They had hurled tons of rock down upon their foes; and now, after the madness of the conflict seemed to be over, they were resigning themselves to defeat and the loss of their home, without a syllable escaping their lips. The dumbness of their grief made it pitiful to behold.

The eaves of the monastery now showed a decided sag in the centre, and the removal of only two or three more of the posts must inevitably cause the structure to break in two and go crashing into the chasm.

"Oh, Mr. Smith—Jack—cannot something be done?" cried Norelle, at this juncture, approaching me with fear-drawn face. "Have you not firearms with which to disperse those negroes?"

What did I care whether the monastery fell, or

flew away to the clouds? She had called me "Jack," and I was tempted to tell her that the Voodoos might have the house, and welcome to it, if she would only repeat the name. Instead, however, I replied:

"There's nothing resembling firearms about this place. Larry and I lost ours yesterday. But have no fear. Even if they pull down the building, we can still escape into the mountain."

"Into the mountain!" she echoed, in surprise. "How can you get into the mountain?"

"Easy, indeed," I replied. "Back of the monastery the monks have constructed a wonderful system of tunnels, which extend for miles into the rock. They have their forges, their kitchens, their mines, and their tombs in there; and it would be a matter of little consequence if the building did fall. As far as Larry and I have learned, there are no apartments in the house, except such as are used as sleeping and eating rooms and the library."

"How wonderful!" exclaimed Norelle. "I had an idea that the monks did nothing but pray to the sun, or something like that."

"They are the hardest workers you ever saw in all your life," I said. "But there goes another post. One or two more will finish the monastery,

and I think we had better be getting ready to make a dash for the tunnels."

"Where is Mr. Sullivan!" asked Norelle.

"He ran into the mountain a few minutes ago—to fetch some new engine of war, I believe. But I fear that nothing can save the monastery now. It does seem a shame that a structure which must have cost such tremendous effort to build, and which has stood for ages, should be torn down by a lot of ignorant blacks within an hour or two."

The Voodoos were evidently preparing to make an assault upon three of the posts at once. The three selected were grouped under the centre of the building. With machetes, knives, and pointed sticks, they dug furiously; and the shrill voice of the Yellow Queen, who still maintained her position in the cart, could be heard at intervals, urging them on to more rapid effort. Some of the negroes, who were not digging, brought branches of trees, which they held over the backs of the workers, to protect them from the fragments of ore and rock dropped by the monks.

Larry came from the monastery door, with his followers, just as I was about to lead Norelle into the tunnel. He and all his assistants were sweating like haymakers—and little wonder, when one

saw the burdens which they had brought from the bowels of the mountain.

Swung upon long bars of brass, supported at either end by five men apiece, were three huge kettles of molten copper. Although we stood fully twenty feet from the nearest pot, I could feel the torrid breath from its glistening surface.

"Bring on the axes," cried Larry, "and chop some holes over the spots where they are digging down below."

A dozen monks ceased hurling rocks, to lay hold of axes and obey. One big hole was cut in the floor of the inclosure, and two within the building itself.

"That'll do!" shouted Larry, wiping the perspiration from his forehead and chin. "Now we'll see what we can do toward making it hot for them down below."

Acting under his orders, the kettle bearers brought their burdens to the apertures cut in the floor, and let them through carefully. The brass bars were then resting on the floor; and the pots, filled with molten metal, were swinging underneath.

"Now pull out the bars," cried Larry.

Three golden balls dropped through space, as the rods were pulled through the handles of the

pots. They caught the rays of the sun, and looked like pretty toy balloons, as they plunged toward the black diggers, two hundred feet beneath.

Two of the kettles tipped over before they had made half the drop, and their red contents had spread out in feathery showers, fifty feet in diameter, by the time they struck the Voodoo people.

The third pot dropped true as a plummet, landed in the midst of the largest group of diggers, upset, and poured its crimson soup over their backs.

A scream as of lost souls in the Pit came up from the negroes. The leaves of their tree shields, and the rags of their garments, sprang into flame, to add to the tortures inflicted by the spattering, molten copper. Dozens of the blacks fell writhing upon the ground; more than a score lay struggling in pools of the liquid fire; while the few who were able picked themselves up, to run, limping and whimpering, to the edge of the wood, where Joan of Lazzarre sat in her two-wheeled carriage of state, a frenzied witness of the havoc wrought among her people.

For a moment, the Yellow Queen stood upright in the cart, transfixed with horror. Then she waved her arms wildly, and launched a curse against the monastery and all within its walls.

We could not hear her words, and might not have understood them had we been able to hear; but it was easy to divine her meaning. Then she gathered the remnant of her force about her, and harangued with the evident purpose of sending them back to the assault. But, from the gestures made by the black men and women, it was easy to surmise that they refused to obey. All heart for fight was gone from them. At last, Joan gave up the attempt, and ordered them to collect the dead and injured.

Dejectedly, they went to the assistance of their fellows who still lived, and bore them into the forest beyond our view. With rude stretchers of interwoven boughs, they removed the dead, while the hungry vultures from the monastery wheeled in circles above their heads, in anticipation of a horrid feast.

When I withdrew my gaze from the loophole in the floor, I saw that Norelle was regarding Larry with horrified eyes.

"You brute!" she exclaimed, at last, with a shudder. "To think that a white man would be responsible for a thing like that."

"Thank you," he retorted, with a forced laugh. "I'll admit it is a shabby trick, to pour hot copper on the backs of a crowd; but you should not for-

get, my little lady, that they were trying good and hard to kill us all. And you might also remember that the fight started over your own sweet self."

"I hate you!" she exclaimed, with eyes ablaze. As she spoke, she placed her hand on my arm, and drew me to the other side of the inclosure.

CHAPTER XIV

FROM THE LIBRARY WINDOW

THE next two weeks were the happiest, and, at the same time, the most miserable, within my recollection. I was in Norelle's company during the better part of each day—which in itself is enough to account for my happiness. But she led me such a dance, with her whims and caprices, that I was often plunged from the seventh heaven of bliss to the pit of despair three times an hour. At one moment she clung to my arms, and gazed into my eyes with all the tenderness of steadfast love; at the next she was calling me "Mr. Smith," and ordering me from her presence.

I could have forgiven most of her ill treatment by laying it at the door of overwrought nerves. What she had gone through, within the last few days, was quite enough to upset the strongest and cloud the sunniest of natures. The Voodoo people were still threatening us from below, although they had not renewed active hostilities; and we

momentarily expected them to emerge from the jungle, with some new plan of attack.

We had expected General and Mrs. Pierson to join us in our exile, but had been disappointed in this through the occurrence of certain events in St. Croix. The general and his wife both wrote encouraging letters to Norelle, but even these written words of cheer scarcely served to dispel the gloom which the shadow of death had cast over the little party in the monastery.

We learned that the governor-general had declared both Larry and myself outlaws, and had placed a price upon our heads. In his proclamation calling upon all true and loyal citizens to refuse us aid and shelter, and give us up to justice, we were described as escaped murderers from the United States of America, and criminals dangerous to the peace of Gabrielle.

All these circumstances, I say, would have been enough to ruffle the spirits of any one; and I should have not complained had Norelle merely played me hot and cold. But when she deliberately coquetted with one of the monks, and caused him to fall desperately in love with her, I thought it was high time to remonstrate, and did so.

The monk in question was Pietro, the librarian—he of the hooked nose and glittering eyes, to

whom I had taken such a violent aversion upon first acquaintance. Possibly it was because she knew I disliked the man that Norelle singled him out for favor. If she had set out with the deliberate purpose of rendering me insanely jealous, she could have chosen no surer or swifter method than by smiling upon Pietro.

More times than I now care to remember, I found them together in the great hall of manuscripts, beside the wide window overlooking the abyss. Once, when I entered the library, Pietro was holding her hand. When he heard my footstep, he dropped it, with a guilty look; and Norelle blushed to the roots of her hair. She avoided me during the rest of that day, but toward evening I was fortunate enough to encounter her in the hall.

"There is something about which I should like to speak with you," I said, planting myself squarely before her.

"But I do not care to speak with you, Mr. Smith," she retorted, with a toss of her head. "I can imagine nothing from you that would interest me in the least."

"Nevertheless, you shall hear me," I went on.

"If you do not let me pass, I will scream," she exclaimed.

"Scream to your heart's content," I retorted. "I shall wait until you are through screaming, and will then have my say. I will tell you, then, if I cannot tell you now, that you are making the saddest mistake of your life in leading on that fool of a librarian. I will tell you that you are playing with a fire of which you know but little—a fire that is certain to burn you, if you persist. Where do you think your affair with him will end? Will you have him for a husband? Will you take him, mutilated and tongueless, back to the States; or will you fly from the monastery with him, pursued by the brethren whose vows he will violate, to live with him here on the island, among the Spaniards and negroes? Where, I ask, is this affair to end?"

"Quite melodramatic, Mr. Smith," she retorted saucily. "I can see you, at no distant day, a most successful writer of penny dreadfuls."

"Sarcasm will not excuse you, Norelle," I cried, "and you know it as well as I. If you will not answer my question, I will answer it for you. There can be but——"

"You are impudent and insolent, Mr. Smith!" she interrupted angrily. "I am of age, fully able to take care of myself, and will have none of your advice and none of your preaching. If it pleases

me to spend an hour or two a day in the library, I shall do so—and I need no chaperon, I assure you. I find Brother Pietro a very agreeable companion. He has one redeeming quality which you do not possess—he minds his own business, and keeps quiet.”

With this heartless shot, Norelle turned, and, entering her room, slammed the door. I did not see her again that day.

The next morning, to my surprise and gratification, she was as friendly and cordial as though no cloud had ever passed between us.

Nearly two weeks passed without incident or note. Several times, Larry and I descended to the ground for the purpose of reconnoitring; and on these occasions were accompanied by a body-guard of monks, all armed to the teeth, and provided with coats of mail and helmets, to protect them against the knives and spears of the Voodoos. When it was necessary for several persons to make the trip between the earth and the monastery, the boatswain's chair was replaced by a cage, not unlike those used in the coal mines of the States. The drum which wound and unwound the chain was turned by hand, the cogs and cranks of the apparatus being concealed in the second story of the building. Although the power was

primitive, the character of the machinery was, to my eyes, as up-to-date as any in a modern machine shop.

In spite of my repugnance for Pietro, I spent considerable time in the library, and within a week had learned much of historical interest concerning the strange brotherhood among whom we were sojourning.

According to the ancient Spanish manuscripts, the monastery was built upon the face of the cliff soon after Cortez conquered Mexico. Izaquil, a priest of the sun, had fled from Yucatan with four faithful followers. When they reached the coast, closely followed by their enemies, the five had put to sea in a raft. Before escaping from the clutches of the Spaniards, however, Izaquil had been horribly tortured, because he refused to reveal the location of the treasure owned by the priests in the Temple of the Sun. After trying in vain to compel him to betray his trust, the Spaniards tore out his tongue.

The sun god conveyed Izaquil's raft safely to the Island of Gabrielle, where he was, for a time, sorely beset by new foes. Had he not taken refuge with his followers in a great tree, to which they were led by the sun god, the savage tribes on the island would surely have killed them; and,

had their patron deity even then deserted them, the barbarians would have starved them to death.

But, as in all their travels, the sun god had befriended them, he did not forsake them now, but sent a flock of condors to their assistance. These great birds brought them food for many days; and the savages, at last realizing that the strangers were under the protection of a powerful spirit, abandoned the attack, and made terms of peace with Izaquil. To signify their devotion to their leader, Izaquil's four faithful followers cut out their tongues; and thus the sect of dumb monks was founded. Thereafter, all who joined the brotherhood were obliged to submit to the same terrible ordeal.

Since Izaquil landed on Gabrielle, the records stated, no word had ever passed the lips of a worshipper of the sun. In remembrance of the aid brought when they were in such sore need, the monks made the condor a sacred bird, and, as long as they had been upon the island, had fed the vultures daily.

In time, the monks gained many recruits; and the quarters in the great tree, although enlarged and rendered habitable by the erection of a huge structure among the branches, became too small

for the silent colony. So, they set about building the House on Stilts. Twenty years were consumed in this great task; and, by the sun god's favor, Izaquil was spared to direct the labors of the builders, and to lead the devotions of the sect from the lofty platform facing east. He was even granted the supreme joy, before he departed, of offering holy blood and ashes to the sun god from the rock of sacrifice.

The marvelous tunnels in the mountain were also planned by Izaquil; and, although he did not live to see them far advanced, the discovery of the process of preserving the dead had been made before he went to take his place in the Chariot of the Sun. It was also written in the records that, so long as Izaquil stood in the great octagonal chamber, all would prosper with the Island of Gabrielle. But the day which dawned and found him not with his protecting arms outstretched over his faithful disciples, would mark the fall of the monastery, and the triumph of the unholy fires which smouldered beneath the roots of Mont Lazarre.

The writer of the manuscript dwelt at length upon the sanctity of Izaquil's life, and described in detail the manner in which he offered sacrifices to the sun god on the altar of rock, which jutted

from the face of the cliff eight or ten feet above the floor of the inclosure at one end of the monastery building.

There were annual offerings of human beings, it seems; the council of seven choosing the victims and prescribing the mode of their death. Fire seemed to be the favorite means employed, although, under certain conditions, the priests were to cut the victims into fragments, and feed the pieces to the condors.

This history was but one of many curious works which I found on the shelves in the great room wherein Pietro spent his days. He was engaged, when we arrived, in making a translation of one of the old books of law which Izaquil had written for the guidance of his followers; and I must say for him that he was a rapid and beautiful penman. As to the accuracy of his translations from the ancient Aztec I know not, although he was accounted the most deeply versed of any in the brotherhood, and was often consulted by Xaca, the high priest. I was not surprised, therefore, to learn that he exercised a powerful influence over the old man; and, as the high priest's word was law under the monastery roof and in the tunnel workshops, Pietro was surely a man whose good will was worth possessing.

We soon became fairly proficient in communicating with the monks by signs; and, when we wished to ask questions, or desired replies which the hand and head were unable to convey, we found that most of them wrote and read a fair sample of Spanish. We, therefore, carried writing pads with us when we went about the monastery or caverns, and got along quite comfortably.

One day—it was the sixteenth after our coming—I entered the room of manuscripts, and found it empty. The ever-present Pietro was nowhere to be seen, so I helped myself to one of the old Spanish records, and pored over it for an hour. Wearying of the study, I replaced the copper tube upon the shelf, and walked to the window, where I stood for some time, lost in contemplation of the magnificent scene spread out before my eyes.

The day was glorious overhead, and, with its foreground of tropic verdure and background of towering mountains, it was none the less magnificent below. Mont Lazarre was belching smoke like a battle ship getting under way. Indeed, I had never seen Father Mountain show such violent signs of activity; and, in spite of the brightness of the day, I was sure I could see the glare of fire bronzing the smoke where it poured from the crater's mouth.

A stealthy footfall struck my ear, as I stood gazing out of the window; and instinctively I whirled around. Pietro was standing behind me in a half-crouching attitude, his long fingers working convulsively, and his face distorted with hate. The moment I turned, he straightened up, and a smile replaced the scowl upon his evil face.

"You were going to push me out of the window, you hound!" I blazed.

He shrugged his shoulders in a deprecating way, and shook his head, while he smiled curiously. Then he reached for my pad, and wrote: "See Mont Lazarre. Trouble is coming."

"By Gad!" I exclaimed. "If I had not heard you behind me, you'd have ended my troubles by dropping me out of the window."

"You are mistaken!" he wrote on the pad.

"There's no use in arguing the thing," I said. "But I'll keep a sharp watch on you after this, my friend."

I told Norelle and Larry of what I believed to be my narrow escape from death, and Larry agreed with me that the librarian would bear watching. Norelle, on the contrary, hurried to his defense.

"The excitement has preyed on your nerves, Mr. Smith," she exclaimed. "I'd take something

for it, if I were you. Go to the apothecary, and get some bromide."

"I thought you'd side with him," I retorted bitterly.

"Isn't it possible that you are angry with him because I prefer his company to yours, at times?" she asked.

"Nothing of the kind!" I replied. "I'd distrust any man whom I found sneaking up behind me, with his body bent for a spring, and his hands outstretched."

"Nerves—nerves—only nerves!" she laughed. Then, turning to Larry, she suggested that he should take her to the copper foundry.

I was evidently dismissed, and walked moodily out of the monastery to the yard, where I stood for some time, gazing at the smoking mountain in the distance. I had been there possibly ten minutes, when there was a whirring of wings above my head. Looking quickly upward, I beheld one of the condors wheeling in narrowing circles toward me. At first, I thought the great bird was preparing for an attack, and glanced hastily around for a weapon. Before I could pick up anything, however, the condor dropped at my feet, and I saw that a roll of white paper was attached to his right leg.

To stoop and cut the string which held the little cylinder to his horny shank was the work of an instant. The condor at once flew to the top of the fence, and then sailed off into the jungle. First looking cautiously around, to make sure that no one was in sight, I unrolled the paper, and read the following mystifying message:

One who loves you from the dead past warns you to beware of the librarian. If you would save your own love from a fate worse than death, seize and destroy the book of laws.

Instinctively, I swept the monastery roof and the towering cliff with my eyes, hoping to catch a glimpse of the person who had sent the carrier bird to me. Perhaps my imagination conjured the form of a monk, leaning over the rock, a thousand feet above my head. Perhaps the figure stood there for the briefest part of a second. If it did, it disappeared like a fleeting shadow. I thrust the paper into my pocket as quickly as possible, and went about with a sinking heart during the rest of the day.

Was Norelle in real danger, I asked myself a thousand times? If so, what was the peril that threatened her? And who was the one that loved me "from the dead past."

At the first opportunity, I showed the writing to Larry.

"The little girl is in danger, and that's enough for us," he exclaimed, his Hibernian fighting blood at once warming to the boiling point, "and it's plain as day what we've got to do."

"What—get the book of laws?" I asked.

"Sure thing," he replied. "But how the devil are we going to get it? Where do you suppose the horse thief keeps the pesky book?"

It was a question which I was not prepared to answer, nor had I any ideas to suggest. The upshot of the matter was that Larry and I both became insatiate readers of manuscripts in the library for the next two days. One or the other of us was in the great hall every instant; but, to our intense chagrin, we could find no trace of the book of laws. This was the volume which Pietro had been translating when we came; but immediately our search for it began, both the ancient Aztec parchment and the translated sheets were concealed by the black-browed monk.

"Perhaps he has finished the job," I suggested to Larry, at the end of the second day of discouragement.

"Not at all likely. He smells a mice," replied

Sullivan. "I suppose all we can do is to lie low and wait."

Nor had we long to wait for startling developments.

On the second night afterward, I was awakened by a hand upon my forehead. When I opened my eyes, I found the room almost as light as day from the rays of the moon shining into the window. A monk, hooded and gowned, stood beside my couch.

"Who are you?" I gasped, after conquering my first impulse to awaken Larry, who was snoring loudly not ten feet distant.

The monk shook his head.

"Are you the one who knew me in the dead past?" I asked, remembering the strange phrase in the message brought to me by the condor.

This time the monk inclined his head. As he did so, he held out his hand. I stretched mine forth, expecting to meet his in friendly clasp; but, instead, I received a little roll of paper. As soon as my fingers closed around it, the monk glided from the room, and I was left staring, open-mouthed and open-eyed, at the moonlight. With the aid of a match—for the writing was too faint to be deciphered in the moonbeams—I read:

Too late. Xaca has the law. Flee with the one you love.

I aroused Larry, and read him the message. He was quite as much mystified, even if not as much alarmed, as myself.

"Well, suppose he has the law—what of it?" he asked. "I'm willing that he have all the law he wants. He can't get too much law for me. But what I don't tumble to is, how the devil old Xaca having the law cuts any ice with us."

"I suppose we'll see, one of these days," I replied, "if we don't follow our friend's advice, and move. It's all right for him to tell me to run away with the young lady; but if I can't get away, how the mischief am I going to flee?"

"The elevator won't run without the assistance of half a dozen of the monks," said Larry. "If you'll tell me how we can get down without the lift, you'll be a wonder."

"I'm no wonder," I admitted sadly. "About the only thing I can suggest is to catch half a dozen of the condors, and make them take us to earth. It might be rather risky, but I think it would work."

"Fine plan!" sneered Larry. "And, when you got down to the bottom, what would happen?"

Why, the Yellow Queen and her little black boys would chop you into bits, and eat you for dinner. Don't forget that the yellow lady is still waiting for you down there. I believe she has hopes of marrying you yet, Jack."

"We might hitch up enough bird power to carry us a long way off," I went on, loath to abandon the idea of the living air ship.

"And be dumped into the crater of Mont Lazarre, or into the Caribbean. Excuse me from any such scheme as that," said Larry. "I guess I'll run my chances where I am now. If something's going to happen to me, I want it to take place when my feet are on dry land."

"They are some distance from dry land now," I remarked.

"Well, they're dry, anyway," exclaimed Larry; "and this board floor is a pretty good imitation of earth."

It was midafternoon of the day following, and I was wandering about the monastery inclosure, greatly depressed in spirits. I had not slept for a moment, the night before, and was almost unnerved. The mysterious warnings had preyed upon my mind to such an extent that I would have welcomed almost any real physical danger, as a relief from the strain of waiting for that which,

as yet, had no form or substance. Sullivan, on the contrary, had slept all night as soundly and peacefully as a child. His life on the plains and on the police force had instilled into him a contempt for danger which I would have given worlds to possess. Besides that, Larry had no nerves. Moreover, he was not head over ears in love with the girl whom danger threatened.

In my walk, I passed from end to end of the monastery yard, and, as usual, found the place deserted. All the monks were busy with their various vocations, and I thought to myself how easy it would have been then for the Yellow Queen's people to have stormed the lofty fortress. They would have had ample time to scale the high posts, and overrun the place, before the monks could have been summoned from their work in the tunnels. During my solitary promenade, I walked several times beneath the rock of sacrifice, which I had seen mentioned in the ancient writings, and as none of the monks were about to resent my curiosity, I seized upon the occasion thus offered to make an inspection.

The rock was a peculiar formation, some ten feet square, jutting out from the face of the cliff like a mantel or bracket shelf from the wall of a room. In thickness the shelf was about two feet;

it had been planed and shaven by the elements of the ages until its sides were as smooth as though sand-papered. A well-constructed stairway of planks made ascent easy from the floor of the inclosure, and I stood upon the rock within half a minute after I had taken the notion into my head.

If I had expected to discover any gruesome signs of the human sacrifices which, in times gone by, had been offered upon that ancient altar, I was doomed to disappointment. The winds and rains had washed all vestiges of ashes from the ledge, and beyond some dark stains, which might have been caused by blood, or might have been the mark of some mineral agent in the rock when it was formed, there was nothing to be seen. I quickly descended the stairs, and resumed my moody pacing of the yard.

Twice I made the circuit of the building, and was about to start on another, when I halted, with every nerve tense, and my heart almost at a standstill.

I had heard from above a sound which I verily believe would arouse me from my grave. It was the sound of Norelle sobbing.

Looking swiftly around and above, I found that the sobbing came from the overhanging gable

window of the library. Then I dashed into the monastery, and up the stairs.

As I reached the top of the steps, my sweetheart cried again, and this time, I was sure, she called my name.

The door of the library was shut and bolted. A crevice, two or three inches in width at the top of the door, caused by the warping of the structure when the Voodoos made their attack, allowed the sounds of an awful struggle to reach my ears.

I dashed my full weight against the door, but it would not yield.

Swearing, crying, grinding my teeth, I raced down the hallway, looking for some implement of destruction—some axe or hammer, with which to beat in the door.

At the turn of the corridor, beside a window, I found a copper flower pot. How I lifted it I know not. It must have weighed, with its earthen contents, more than a hundredweight, but I seized it with the frantic strength of desperation, and staggered back to the library door.

I do not remember lifting the weight above my head, or hurling it against the timbers of the door; nor do I remember how the stout boards crashed inward, or how I burst into the room after the great copper pot.

But, Lord help me! I do remember the sight which then met my eyes—my love, Norelle, struggling in the arms of that brute, the librarian.

Like an avenging angel, I fell upon him, and my fingers closed about his throat. The poor girl swooned at that moment, with my name upon her lips.

Like a tiger robbed of his prey, Pietro met my attack, and I realized in an instant that he was more than my match in strength. But I found that I could outbox him, and, releasing my grip upon his throat, when I knew that he would surely overpower me, I felled him with a blow in the eye. He was up again, and at me, like a flash, his long arms thrust out to catch and twine around me like the coils of a boa constrictor. Again I brought him to the floor, and again he leaped up to renew the combat. My foot struck against the side of a table, and, before I knew what had happened, I was down, and he was on top of me.

I expected him to try to throttle me, as I had attacked him; but, instead, he threw his arms around my body, and began dragging me toward the window.

In an instant, I saw his design. He would throw me into space.

Have you ever fought for your life? Have you

ever battled with a power stronger than yours, and felt yourself dragged, inch by inch, foot by foot, toward certain death? Have you put forth every muscle, every ounce of strength, until the veins in your forehead stood out like ropes, and your heart seemed about to burst, yet all to no avail?

I saw the big hall of manuscripts slip by me, and the yawning window approach. Now we were within four feet of the sill—now three—now two. Now he is raising me, in another moment the struggle will be over, and he will be alone with Norelle.

Perhaps it was the horror of the thought that gave me back my wits, that put new steel into my arms and caused me to remember a certain jiu-jitsu hold, which I had learned when the fad was at its height in the States. Perhaps it was the way in which he extended his claw-like fingers, for an instant, while shifting his hold to lift me to the window ledge.

Like a flash, I clutched the long fingers, bent them upon his hand, swung his arm around to his back, then up, up to the nape of his neck, until the shoulder bones cracked and he uttered a whine of pain. He clutched wildly at the air with his free hand, while trying to release the agonizing

hold, and then fell limp as a rag upon the sill, as I dislocated his shoulder.

Then I raised him clear of the window, and pushed him over. I watched him turning odd somersaults in the air until he landed, no larger than a good-sized pin, all in a heap at the foot of one of the pillars.

CHAPTER XV

THE CAVE OF REPENTANCE

XACA and several of his monks rushed into the room, two minutes after the librarian's spinning body struck the ground. I was trying vainly to comfort Norelle, who had revived, in the meantime, sufficiently to witness the tragic end of the struggle. Larry strode into the library on the heels of the monks, and at once divined the situation.

"The hooknosed gentleman went out that way, I presume," he said, with a wave of his hand in the direction of the window.

"He did," I replied. "It had to be one of us, you know."

"What started it?"

"I heard Miss Pierson scream, came up, found the door bolted, and then broke in," I replied.

Norelle buried her face in her hands, and sobbed pitifully.

"I see," said Larry. "If I was a lawyer up in the States, I'd say you had a mighty good case."

As we don't happen to be in the States, however, I'll reserve my decision."

Xaca and his brethren had, in the meantime, gone to the window, and assured themselves of Pietro's fate. The high priest then evidently gave orders for the recovery of the librarian's body; for two of the monks left the room, and soon afterward we heard the creaking of the windlass. Xaca then held a consultation with his subordinates at the other end of the hall.

"I suppose I'm in for it, now," I said. "But I could not have done otherwise. It was his life or mine."

"Now, don't you be after worrying, Jack, my boy," exclaimed Larry cheerfully. "They won't lay hands on you, if they know what's healthy for 'em."

The high priest concluded the conference, approached us, and produced a writing pad, upon which he penciled a few lines. Tearing off the sheet, he handed it to me.

*You have taken the life of a priest of the sun.
Prepare to appear before the council of seven.*

"Where, and when?" I asked. "And if I do appear, will I be given a fair trial?"

"The council will weigh your justification," he wrote in reply. "You will appear before the council when the sun god is at the zenith tomorrow. Go to the hall of the sacred dead at the appointed hour, and you will find a priest who will conduct you to the hall of justice."

More than that I was unable to extract from the old man. What the council of seven was likely to do with my case, I could but conjecture; and the result of my speculation was anything but pleasant. I conjured up pictures of torture chambers and dungeon cells, and saw myself immured for years, if not for life, deep in the copper caverns.

Norelle, on the verge of a nervous breakdown, went to her room, and Larry and I walked gloomily out into the monastery yard. Certain that we could not escape from the monastery or the tunnels, the monks paid no heed to our movements, and we were left to our own resources during the remainder of the day.

"I am for making a fight," asserted Larry, after we had canvassed the situation at length. "If I was you, I wouldn't go a step toward the hall of justice. From all I've seen of halls of justice, the under dog always gets the worst of it. You're the under dog in this case, because that man Pete,

or whatever they called him, has probably got a lot of friends in the court."

"But maybe I'll get a fair trial," I said. "From all I've seen of these monks, they are far in advance of a great many civilized communities. Why isn't it possible that they will administer justice as well as they follow other civilized vocations?"

"Because they're heathens, that's because," replied Larry emphatically. "A gang of grown-up men that worship chickens or turkeys like they do, and go out of mornings to turn themselves inside out when the sun rises, must be wrong in the upper story. My opinion is that they are all bug-house, and if you stand trial before their council of seven, or whatever they call their supreme court, you're going to get the worst of it."

"What would you do?" I asked.

"I'd put up a scrap—kill off a few dozen of the duffers in their bathrobes—and make a quick getaway."

"Suppose we got away from here—where would we go?" I asked. "We can't go back to St. Croix without falling into the clutches of Varney. We can't take refuge anywhere else in the country, because of the Yellow Queen."

"I'd rather be in either place than here, where

you can't leave the house without looking up the head teacher and asking permission," replied Sullivan. "That's what galls me most up here. It's too much like being in jail."

"I think I'll wait and see what happens," I decided finally. "I am likely to get a fair trial, and be freed as soon as they hear my testimony. After the kind treatment I have received from Xaca and the other monks, I'd hate to fight them as enemies. If I do not get a fair trial, and anything serious is threatened, we can still put up the fight."

The windlass began to revolve as we finished the discussion, and soon the copper basket was lifted over the wall. I shuddered, in spite of myself, to see the burden it brought aloft—two priests living, and one dead. The last was nothing more than a shapeless mass of shattered bones and torn garments. The monks lifted the remains over the edge of the basket, and carried the gruesome load into the monastery.

"I'd like to have you answer me one question," said Larry.

"What is it?" I asked.

"How the deuce they are going to make a piece of copper plate out of him?"

"I wish you would quit talking about the dead!"

I cried angrily. "You have gone mad on the subject of those horrible statues. Can't you see that even a hint of the subject is enough to drive me to distraction? How am I going to keep up my nerves when you are continually harping on such things?"

"Forgive me, old fellow," he exclaimed. "I didn't mean any harm. I was just trying to cheer you up."

"Graveyards and corpses are not cheering themes, just now," I exclaimed.

As the afternoon sun slanted over the crest of Mont Lazarre, Larry and I noted the fact that the crater was belching forth a greater volume of smoke than usual. Not only was it smoking, but, in addition to the smudge, lurid tongues of fire shot from the funnels at intervals of every two or three minutes, and an almost continuous rumbling came from the roots of the mountain.

These reverberations seemed to travel through the earth along the ridges of the mountains, which formed the backbone of the island. Once in a while there would be a louder, sharper detonation than usual, as though the underground army had forsaken its drums for its cannon, and was now bombarding the enemy, instead of beating the dead march. When these heavier explosions

took place, the monastery, and the cliff against which it was built, trembled perceptibly.

"If Mont Lazarre cuts up many more pranks, I'd rather be up in the States than on the island," observed Larry.

"They say that the volcano has not been active for hundreds of years," I said. "It has periods of semi-activity, like that you see now, but it has never been known to do any real damage."

How I spent the remainder of that day, I do not know. I may have eaten, but I do not remember going to the table; I may have talked with Larry or some of the monks, but do not recall the circumstance. Much of the time I passed in a monotonous walk up and down the length of the monastery yard, watching the condors as they wheeled a thousand feet above, or fixing my vacant eyes upon the fiery funnel of Mont Lazarre.

Norelle crept from her room, in the afternoon, and joined me. What few broken sentences passed between us are of no consequence. Our hearts were too full for speech; but we realized that we loved each other, and that the span of our affection might be brief. I remember that she asked me if I would forgive her; and when I swore that she had done nothing which needed forgiveness,

she burst into a torrent of tears, and said she was the wickedest woman in all the world.

I did my best to convince her that Pietro and I were bound to have come to blows sooner or later, and that her participation in the affair had only hastened the end.

"Oh, why did I ever come to this horrible place?" she sobbed. "And if I had to come to the island, why did they not let me fall into the hands of the Voodoos, and receive my punishment? Then, at least, I would not have caused that man's death, and your unjust trial."

"You talk as though I had been sentenced to punishment," I expostulated. "I am not going to suffer—mark my words. I'm coming out of this all right, and we'll be happy yet."

As the darkness gathered, and we walked toward the door of the monastery, several of the condors came sailing down from the heights and alighted on the great, flat rock that jutted from the cliff. They ranged themselves in a row along the front of the rock, and, in the twilight gloom, looked like solemn judges sitting on the bench.

"There are seven of them," exclaimed Norelle.

"It's the council of seven," I said, laughing grimly at the idea, "and they have decided to go to sleep on the rock of sacrifice."

At noon on the following day, I proceeded to the hall of the copper statues, going unattended and unarmed. Larry would have gone with me, but I urged him to remain with Norelle. "Her safety is more to me than life itself," I said. "I know you will take good care of her, if I do not return."

"But why not make our stand now?" exclaimed Larry. "The two of us can put up a better fight, now, than I can by myself, after they have put the bracelets on you. Don't be after going a step, my lad."

"They are not going to do me any harm, old partner," I reassured him. "If we kick up a rumpus, they'd be pretty sure to make trouble. So just be quiet, and await developments. I trust in the fairness and justice of Xaca, and I feel confident that my trust is not misplaced."

"I don't like his whiskers," was Larry's irreverent reply.

The parting from Norelle was not so easy. In spite of all her attempts to be brave, she burst into tears, and flung herself into my arms, meanwhile calling herself a murderess. As I kissed her wet cheeks and trembling lips, and attempted to utter a few hopeful words, I could almost have blessed the fate which had given me my love at

last. It was the first time I had ever kissed her, and the first time she was ever in my arms, a willing prisoner. Slowly I loosened the fingers which vainly tried to detain me, kissed her once more, and went into the tunnel of the copper lamps.

As I now look back upon the events of that day, it seems as though I must have dreamed them. They fill a niche in my memory like some horrible creation of delirium—fantastic, grotesque, weird, and unreal, yet seared into my brain with letters of fire, which time will never efface. I would dismiss the subject with a paragraph, if I could; for even now, after the lapse of years, as I look back upon that trial in the low-vaulted chamber, the sombre figures of the council of seven arise to chill my blood.

When I reached the chamber of the copper statues, I found a monk awaiting me. His face was unfamiliar, but he bowed as though we had met before, and I returned the salutation. Then he led the way down one of the tunnels, and I took step beside him. After we had proceeded a distance of perhaps a quarter of a mile, he stopped in front of a huge brazen door, and knocked three times. The massive metal portal swung silently inward, and I entered.

My footsteps sounded hollow and strange, and

awoke sepulchral echoes in the far corners of the hall, within which my trial was to be held.

Advancing to the middle of the chamber, I discerned the councilmen seated in the arc of a circle upon a platform, raised some four feet from the floor. At the front of the stage, and in the centre, was an upright block of stone, upon which rested an open, copper-bound volume, and a lighted torch.

The pale blue flame from the torch beside the book was the only light within the room, and it was with difficulty that I could distinguish the forms of the black-gowned priests behind.

As I entered, the central one of the seven arose from his seat and approached the lectern. I was irresolute as to where I should take my stand, but finally decided to proceed until I reached a point opposite the book and torch, where I bowed to my judges and stopped, to await their will.

The one who had arisen I now saw to be Xaca, the head priest. His aged face, chiseled in sharp lines by the pale radiance of the torch, seemed cold as ice and cruel as revenge. He bent his eyes upon the open book, but gave no sign that he was aware of my arrival.

I waited for a full minute, and, in spite of all my resolutions of courage, felt my heart beating

like a trip-hammer with fear. At last I could bear the awful silence no longer, and cried: "I am here, O priests of the sun!"

Slowly Xaca turned his eyes toward me, and, lifting his hand, beckoned for me to approach. I drew nearer to the block of stone, and, as he continued to beckon, mounted the platform with some little effort, and stood at his side. Then Xaca placed his index finger upon the open book, and indicated that I should read the page beneath his hand.

It was the book of law of Izaquil. My eyes almost started from their sockets, as I read the following words:

He who slays a Priest of the Sun shall die on the Rock of Sacrifice.

He who slays a Priest of the Sun shall be consumed by fire.

He who slays a Priest of the Sun shall be burned by the Sun God whom he has angered.

He who slays a Priest of the Sun shall spend three days and three nights in the Cave of Repentance.

He who slays a Priest of the Sun shall be judged and sentenced by the Council of Seven. On the Day of Atonement, which shall be three days and

three nights after he has entered the Cave of Repentance, shall he be placed upon the Rock of Sacrifice and consumed by the sacred fire sent by the Sun God

So decrees Izaquil.

I looked up from the page of law, and gazed into the pitiless eyes of the high priest. I would have found more mercy in the sightless orbs of the copper-coated dead, out in the hall of statues. I looked around at the immovable, silent figures of the six other judges, and realized that I was doomed.

"I demand a trial," I cried, struggling hard to overcome the nameless clutching terror at my heart. "I killed him only as a last resort, and in self-defense, after I had tried to protect the honor of the girl whom I would make my wife. Surely, if any man ever had justification for homicide, I had. Surely, wise judges, you would not condemn a man for that. Surely Pietro deserved his fate!"

I was pleading with images of stone. Again Xaca's white fingers pointed at the page of law.

"Think for a moment of what you would do!" I cried, now speaking in choked and trembling tones. "You are about to condemn and sacrifice an innocent man. Because Pietro happened to be

a priest of the sun, he had no right to attack a woman, a guest of the monastery, and, when foiled in that purpose, he had no right to attempt my life. If you are priests, true to your holy vows, you will abhor such a crime as Pietro attempted, and must forgive and absolve me for my act."

Once again Xaca's finger pointed at the terrible law.

"Then you'll have to take me," I cried, suddenly reaching my decision. I realized that I had nothing to hope from those seven monks who sat in judgment upon me, and my fighting blood overcame the chill of fear which had well-nigh paralyzed my heart.

With one bound, I was off the platform, and in another moment was darting toward the door. If I could regain the monastery, I would take my stand, with Larry at my side, and with whatever weapons fate placed in our hands. I felt confident that, together, we could defy and vanquish the whole brotherhood.

As I sped toward the entrance, some unseen power closed the great brass door, and I was locked in the hall of justice with my seven judges. In vain I threw myself against the metal barrier, and sought to find the bolt or latch that held it shut. It was as smooth as glass, and as solid as the

wall of rock within which it was set. Then I looked around for some weapon of defense.

Not a movable object was within sight or reach, save the book and the torch upon the platform, and I backed up against the brazen portal, like a rat into the farthest corner of his trap, resolved to sell my life as dearly as possible.

Neither Xaca nor any of the other councilmen seemed disturbed by my outbreak. I had expected them to surround and fall upon me, and knew that, if they did, such a contest could have but one ending. Sure as I was of defeat, I was resolved to die fighting.

"Come on!" I shouted, finding additional courage in the mere sound of my voice. "Come on and take me; but, before you do, I'll show you how an American can die."

The defiance had scarcely left my lips before my eyes were dazzled by an overpowering flood of light, blazing from above. A score of huge copper lamps burst into flame overhead, and down the hall, toward me, coming from I knew not where, marched a squad of soldier monks, mail clad, with shields upon their arms, and spears leveled at my breast.

Rage, astonishment, terror, and despair struggled for the mastery within me. When they had

approached within ten feet of me, I rushed at them, with a scream of desperation, intending to impale myself upon their spears.

But even in this attempt of self-destruction I was balked. Instead of piercing me with a dozen wounds, the spears were thrown upward, and I crashed into the phalanxed shields of the nearest monks. Before I was able to gather myself together from the shock of impact, muscular arms had pinioned me, and I was a prisoner.

"Coward—murderers!" I screamed, struggling in vain to break the chains of flesh and bone. I was like a baby in their grasp.

With the same impassive eyes that had regarded me when I pleaded for mercy, Xaca and his companions on the platform now witnessed my battle with the mutes in mail. The high priest's index finger was still pointing at the page of law. Then Xaca made a sign to my captors; the door of brass was flung open, and I was led out of the hall.

Swiftly, almost noiselessly, the dumb soldiers marched me through the length of several tunnels, toward what I was afterward to know as the cave of repentance.

If I live to pass the century mark, I shall remember every step of that journey to my dying

day. "It is the death march," I muttered to myself, and across my mind flashed other similar processions I had seen. There was the march that I had followed as a reporter, when Maxwell, "the trunk murderer" had gone to the gallows; there was the grim parade through the jail yard of a little Missouri town, when Deustrow, "the millionaire murderer," went to his fate for the slaughter of wife and child. These, and half a dozen other gruesome scenes, came back to me.

But in all these processions I had been an observer. I had gone to describe the actions of the wretch whose trembling feet were counting out the last heartbeats in his bosom. His pallor—his lips, mumbling the name of wife, or baby, or God—the fit of his collar around the neck, where the noose will soon fit tighter still—the stumble that he makes at the gibbet's step—the eyes bursting from their sockets, as he looks up and beholds the wooden frame and the swinging cord instead of the blue sky and the sunshine—these had been but routine items in my mind, once upon a time.

Now, I was the chief figure in the march to doom. The red lights flickering in their copper sockets; the silent soldier monks leading me on; the horror of abandoning the girl I loved to the mercies of the devilish crew in that house of mys-

tery; the menacing thunders of the volcano—all combined to paint for the eye and for the imagination a picture more grisly and more weird than any I had ever described with pen or tongue.

At length we reached another brazen door, which opened at our approach. Behind it was a chamber some fifteen feet in diameter, the only furnishings of which were a bunk, a table, and a copper lamp, swinging from the ceiling. The walls, cut from the solid rock, were smooth and dripping with moisture.

The monks closed the door upon me, and I was alone.

It would be vain to attempt to describe the interminable hours I spent within that cave of despair. For hours I suffered the tortures of the lost, as I contemplated death in the flames upon the rock; then I was buoyed by fleeting moments of hope, as I thought of Larry Sullivan's devotion and bravery, and pictured him coming to my rescue.

Many of the lonesome hours I whiled away in a careful examination of the walls of the cave, which were covered with a mass of letters, figures, symbols, and pictures, Spanish, French, and characters from languages that were strange to me were inextricably mixed upon the rock, but here

and there I could make out phrases which showed that the writers had been, like myself, waiting for death upon the rock of sacrifice.

Many of the pictures scratched upon the stone were executed with considerable skill. One of the best was a remarkable picture of the monastery and its supporting cliff.

Beside the building was shown the sacrificial rock, jutting from the face of the mountain, and upon the stone shelf was the figure of a man bound to a post. Faggots were heaped about his feet, and flames were surrounding his body. Above his head was shown the blazing sun, and circling over him was a flock of condors, while down in the monastery yard was a group of monks, with their arms uplifted to the orb of day.

The man who had graven that picture upon the rock was evidently familiar with the scene—doubtless some monk, who, himself, had often participated in the awful ceremony—and I wondered, as I looked shudderingly at the sketch, how he had come to slay a brother priest, and merit the same death which was so soon to overtake me.

It is, of course, unnecessary to say that I exhausted my ingenuity in trying to devise means of escape. I might have spared myself the trouble, for the metal door was as solid as the moun-

tain, and, though I hurled myself against it, again and again, with all my strength, it did not move the fraction of an inch. Even had I been able to break down the barrier, I doubt that it would have availed me anything in the way of escape; for the monkish guards were doubtless on the other side of the door, ready to meet me with shields and spears.

Finally, worn out in mind and body, I threw myself upon the couch, and, after what seemed to be the lapse of hours, fell into a troubled sleep.

CHAPTER XVI

A NOCTURNAL ADVENTURE

WHEN I opened my eyes, the flame in the copper lamp was flickering, as though from a draught of air. Curiously I gazed about the room, to ascertain the cause, and my eyes fell upon the great bronze door. It was open; it was moving.

I leaped to my feet, and ran toward the door, but as I neared it, my heart sank within me, for I saw that it was softly closing. In another moment, it stopped, and I heard the unmistakable click of the bolt as it was shot into place.

Who had been in my cell? Had there been any one else in the room at all; or was the movement of the door only a dream, that was still playing upon my sleep-benumbed senses? Then I noticed something white at my feet. It was a roll of paper.

Seizing it with feverish haste, I opened it, and recognized the familiar handwriting of the monk who had assured me that he had known me in the dead past.

This is what I read :

Be brave. I will not abandon you. The sentence of Izaquil shall never be carried out. I will come for you to-morrow night.

I thought the next day would never come to an end. I say "day," for we are in the habit of measuring time by the sun, even though he be hidden from us, as he was in my case. I was unable to distinguish day from night in that cell beneath the solid rock, and could only guess at the passage of the hours.

Three times the metal door was opened, and three times an armed monk brought me food and water. Had it not been for the message of hope which I had received, I would have set upon the food bearer, and made an effort to wrest from him his sword and shield. But with the message came cheer to my heart, and a caution which despair would have thrown to the four winds.

Long, long after the ministering monk had made his third visit, as I sat watching the red door with aching eyes, the portal opened softly, and a black figure glided from the corridor. It beckoned to me, and I followed it from the chamber.

Outside the cell door were three monks, whose recumbent figures and hearty snores bespoke the soundness of their slumbers. We sped by them like shadows, and, after passing through the length of the tunnel and the hall of the sacred dead, entered the long corridor of the many lamps, leading to the monastery. My heart leaped with joy at sight of the familiar way; for I believed that the mysterious monk was leading me back to Norelle and Larry. But in this hope I was disappointed.

When we had reached a point twenty feet from the opening of the tunnel, at the rear of the monastery building, my guide opened a concealed door at the side of the corridor, revealing a flight of winding steps, leading downward. These steps were cut out of the solid rock. As we descended them, after carefully closing the door above, I felt a breath of cold air strike my face.

Then, on a sudden, we found ourselves looking into the darkness of the outer night. Below our feet was the abyss. Another step would have hurled us into space.

My companion pressed my hand reassuringly, and, reaching above his head, found a lantern, which he lighted with the aid of flint and steel. Swinging the lantern from side to side, and out as

far as his arm would reach, the monk showed me that we stood at the mouth of a tunnel, many feet below the floor of the monastery.

In front of us, and to our right and left, looking white as ivory pillars against the blackness of the night, were the timbers which supported the building—the timbers which the Voodoos had tried so hard to uproot.

I was about to ask for an explanation of the strange procedure, when the monk wrote and handed me this message :

Help me, John, with all your might, so that the decree of fire shall not be carried out.

So the monk knew my Christian name! As I withdrew my eyes from the slip of paper and looked into his, I saw a tear steal down his cheek. I believe he made an effort to speak with his mute lips. Then his hands sought the tablet, to write another message; but at the next moment, the impulse having passed, he drew a long breath, as though to steel himself against his emotions, and proceeded to the business of the night.

Drawing a large two-handed saw from a place of concealment, he indicated that I was to assist him in cutting through the pillars which supported the building.

"But this will cause the monastery to fall!" I expostulated, in a whisper of astonishment and fear.

To this he nodded his head.

"And Norelle, and Larry, as well as all the others, will be hurled to death," I continued.

This time he shook his head emphatically.

I soon realized that it was not his purpose to overthrow the monastery at once. He merely planned to cut through the great posts with the saw, and leave them standing.

How we toiled through the night; how we sawed pillar after pillar; how we dared death a hundred times, while moving our frail bridges of boards from place to place, so that we might have standing room to do our strange task, is scarcely worth your time to read, or mine to write. Suffice it that, when the first streaks of dawn tinted the sky over the mountain tops, we had finished the work.

The great building stood, to all appearances, as solidly as ever upon its wooden stilts; but my friend, the monk, had contrived so skilfully to cut each timber that the stability of all depended upon one of them. Were this certain post to be displaced from equilibrium, or to receive a sudden jar, I could imagine the whole massive structure

above us toppling like a house of cards into the chasm.

When we had finished the work, we fled back through the corridors to my prison. The guards were still sleeping heavily outside the brazen door. They had apparently stirred not during all the hours we had been gone, and I suspected that they had been given some sort of sleeping potion, to insure their uninterrupted repose.

As the monk was about to leave me, he turned suddenly and threw his arms about me. He seized my hand and wrung it fondly; then he took my writing pad, and wrote:

Good-by, dear boy. We may never meet again. Think of me sometimes as one who loved you more than life.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

To my joyful surprise, the monk paid me another visit on the following day, but my pleasure at meeting him again was short-lived, when I learned the dreadful intelligence he brought.

Three victims had been doomed to die on the rock of sacrifice, instead of one. Norelle and Larry were the other two.

Can you picture my despair, when this awful news was finally conveyed to me through the medium of pencil and paper?

Sinister events had transpired after I left the monastery. At about the time when I was being taken to the cave of repentance, Xaca had discovered in the book of law that Norelle must be offered as a sacrifice to the sun god. In the translation of the volume which Pietro, the fiendish librarian, had completed just before his death, it was recorded that no woman might enter the monastery and live. Her mere presence was a profanation of holy quarters, and she must, upon

discovery, be offered up on the rock of sacrifice, to expiate the sins of her sex.

All this, and more, was written me by the monk, who slipped into my prison three times before the noon of the day set for me to perish on the rock.

He also attempted to write me a description of the magnificent but hopeless battle which Larry fought in defense of Norelle, my sweetheart, but it was not until long afterward that I gained a definite idea of the splendid fight.

It was impossible that the monk, in the few hurried moments at his disposal, could tell me how Sullivan had taken his stand, with Norelle behind him, in the corner of the monastery yard, almost in the shadow of the rock of sacrifice, and there, with nothing but a stout brass bar in his hands, had held at bay for half an hour the entire force of the brotherhood; how he had mowed down the mutes, at their first onset, until he had piled in front of him a bulwark of half a dozen corpses; how they had rushed upon him, again and again, only to fall back with skulls and limbs shattered by that brazen flail; and how, finally, they had brought him low with a mass of ore, hurled down upon him from an upper window of the monastery building. Even as the mob fell upon him to bind him hand and foot, Larry recovered con-

sciousness, and, gripping the throat of one of his assailants, had throttled him to death.

It was a fight worthy of a place in song beside that earlier exploit of Horatius at the Bridge; but, unfortunately, unlike the case of the sturdy Roman who defended the footway spanning the Tiber, victory perched on the side of the numbers. They loaded him with chains, and buried him in a cell, beside which the one I occupied was a prince's palace.

When Larry was overwhelmed, Norelle had attempted to escape the flames by leaping from the monastery wall, but had been frustrated in her design, and was confined in one of the inner rooms of the building.

With my heart torn by the emotions aroused by this narrative, it is small wonder that I was half beside myself when Xaca and his priests came for me shortly before noon. Their coming was a blessed relief from the solitary agonies I had been suffering; and I accompanied them gladly, caring little whether my fate were life or death.

When we had traversed the tunnels, and had reached the face of the cliff, we found the monastery standing as solidly as ever, and I was tempted to believe that I had only dreamed of that night-long toil with the monk. Surely, if my mys-

terious friend were planning to destroy the building, the time for him to act had passed. Little good his intervention would accomplish, after the fagots had been kindled about our feet.

All the monks of the brotherhood seemed to have gathered in the yard. It was impossible to count them in the brief time given me for observation, had I been in the mood—and I surely was not—but there must have been more than three hundred of the cowled figures in the inclosure. I looked in vain for the face of my friend. Perhaps he had deserted me at the eleventh hour; perhaps he had been prevented from coming, and the sacrifice would be made, in spite of all the brave work he had done to save me. My heart sank within me, as I saw the fiendish preparations made by Xaca and his followers, and observed that the sun was rapidly nearing the zenith.

Norelle and Larry, each manacled and heavily guarded, were in the inclosure when I was brought out. The poor girl was pale as death, but there was no trace of tears in her glorious eyes, and when her gaze met mine, I read nothing of fear, nothing of the horror she must have suffered. But I did read and interpret the love light in her eyes, and my heart leaped with joy to know that

she was mine, even in the shadow of doom.

"We will die together, love," she exclaimed, "and will meet again beyond the mountains."

"Do not give up hope, little girl," I replied. "We may be saved, even at this late hour."

"It looks to me as though we were mighty near all in," said Larry. "They've got things all ready on the mantelshelf, up there."

He jerked his head in the direction of the rock of sacrifice, and my eyes at once sought the barbaric altar.

Planted upon it were three stakes, and suspended above the middle one by a copper chain, was a ball of glass, as large as a toy balloon. I could not imagine the purpose of this sphere of crystal, unless it were some ornament or emblem, used in the dread ceremony so soon to begin.

The wooden steps leading to the rock looked like the grim stairs leading to a gallows trap.

My appearance with the high priest was the signal for the mummeries to begin. They had evidently been waiting for their third victim; for, as soon as I emerged from the building, the black monks began a march around the inclosure, making, the meanwhile, strange signs with their hands, and bowing frequently to the blazing sun. After they had circled the yard three times, Xaca,

assisted by two other monks, conducted Norelle, Larry, and myself up the steps to the rock, and there fastened us to the stakes.

Norelle was placed in the centre, directly beneath the strange glass globe; Larry was bound to the stake on her right hand, and I on her left. Sticks of dry wood were piled around our feet, the three stacks of faggots being so near together that, if one were to be lighted, all would blaze. The stakes were planted in such close proximity that, had our arms been free, we could have clasped hands. Directly in front of Norelle, and thrown partly upon the faggots and partly upon the rock, was a mass of feathery wood pith, or some other sort of tinder-like material, which I guessed would be ignited by a spark, and would, in turn, set fire to the faggots and our writhing bodies.

As soon as we were securely fastened to the stakes by copper chains, and the kindling wood had been arranged to their satisfaction, Xaca and his two companions hurriedly left the rock, and rejoined their brethren upon the platform below, where they resumed their marching and gesticulations.

The sun was nearly overhead, and, as his beams beat down upon our foreheads, the heat was al-

most intolerable. Occasionally, a faint breeze fanned the golden curls upon Norelle's brow, and I wondered, with a shudder of horror, how they would look when touched by the withering flames. Would I live to see them smoke and shrivel in the awful heat, or would the flames mercifully spare me the agony of seeing my darling suffer, by taking me first?

Norelle's gaze was fixed upon the east, where the smoke from Mont Lazarre was lazily lifting into the heavens, and if she feared the approach of death, neither the undimmed depths of her eyes nor the calm of her white brow revealed it.

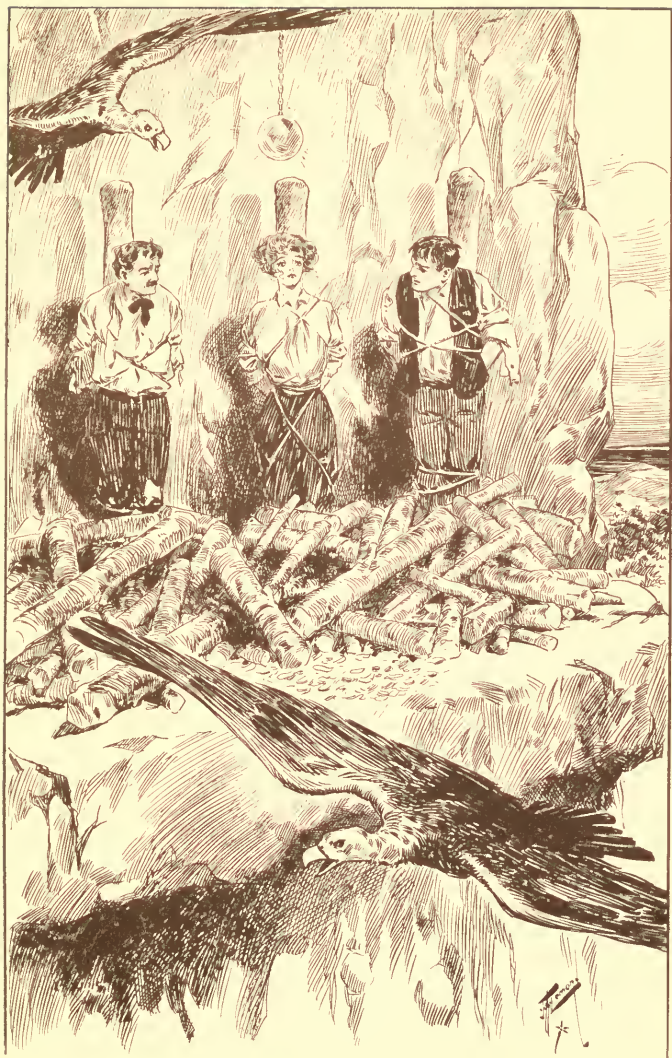
"Come on and light your damned fire, and get it over with!" snarled Larry.

The monks continued their marching. The sun blazed hotter from above.

I had given up all hope of rescue. My friend had failed me, and in a few minutes the smoke and flames from the burning faggots would blot out all semblance of humanity on that dreadful platform.

What was that? A red-hot iron seemed to strike the back of my hand.

Looking down at the point of pain, I beheld a dazzling white spot. Involuntarily, I uttered an exclamation; and as I managed to shift my hand



"LIGHT YOUR DAMNED FIRE AND GET IT OVER WITH!" SNARLED LARRY.

slightly, in spite of its shackles, my mind grasped the significance of the thing.

"The burning glass!" I cried. "It is the burning glass above Norelle's head."

In another moment, the white spot had traveled from my hand to the rock beneath my feet.

What devilish ingenuity! The monks had so hung the crystal ball above Norelle's head that the rays of the sun, passing through it, would, in the course of a few minutes, reach the tinder on the faggots, and start it into blaze. There was no need for human hands to kindle the fire. Izaquil, lord of the sun, from his chariot above, would touch the match himself.

Thank Heaven, Norelle had fainted. The torture of suspense, added to the terror of suffering and death, had done their work, and I prayed fervently that the smoke would also be merciful to her, and bring suffocation before the flames should reach her body.

The dazzling ray of light traveled over the bare rock toward the tinder. Slow as it was, in fact, it seemed to race with lightning speed.

"At the rate it is going," said Larry, "it will be there in less than five minutes. Allow five minutes more for the fire to gain good headway,

and I figure we've just about ten more minutes of —— But what's that?"

A stalwart form leaped from the line of monks, and ran swiftly toward the wooden wall of the inclosure. Xaca and his followers had stopped short in their ceremonial. Horror was depicted on their faces. For a precious moment, they paused, thralled by the unexpected, paralyzed by the terror of the danger that threatened them.

A heavy, long-handled brass sledge rested against the wall. Seizing this with the quickness of light, my friend—for it was he—swung it over his head, and brought it down upon the top of one of the timbers that came up from below.

The monastery quivered like a ship in collision.

Again he raised the mighty weapon, and again it fell upon the pillar.

Now the monastery rocks; now the wooden hulk groans; now the mob of mutes plunge across the open space, to halt the swinging instrument of doom.

A wordless wail, a tongueless scream, bursts from three hundred throats. Once more the great sledge glints redly in the sunlight, as it describes another fearful arc and falls upon the upraised post.

Xaca and his followers have almost reached the wall.

But they are never to arrive—are never to stay that destroying arm. One more stroke and the deed is done.

The long roof of the monastery crumbled like pie crust; the flooring of the yard was gone. For one horrible instant, the crowd of monks was running on air. Then there was a screeching, as timbers split—a crash—a roar—a cloud of dust—space—vacancy—the chasm—the abyss.

It seemed a year before the sickening, muffled roar from below told us that Xaca and his monks, and our deliverer, were no more.

CHAPTER XVIII

FROM THE DOOR OF DOOM

DEATH still traveled swiftly toward us in that dazzling point of light. In three minutes, the sun would be directly overhead, and all the concentrated power of his noonday rays would be shot through the crystal globe upon the inflammable stuff at Norelle's feet. Poor, dear girl! She would be the first to suffer the torture of fire. Long before the flames would reach me, I should be compelled to witness her agonies.

The very thought drove me mad, and I raved like a wild creature as I tugged and twisted at my chains, until the links sunk into my wrists and the blood gushed out, to drip upon the rock. Struggle as I might with all the power of my muscles, I was unable to slip the chains an inch. At last, I fell, weak and sobbing, against the stake.

"We must get loose in two minutes, or never," cried Larry, now striving at his bonds until the veins upon his forehead stood out like ropes. He grew purple in the face.

"We can never do it," I cried, in despair. "What good did our poor friend accomplish, after all? He threw away his own life, and ours will be sacrificed just the same."

Several shadows passed over our heads, and, looking up, we saw that five or six condors were wheeling in narrowing circles over the rock.

"Those vile birds will be cheated of their prey, this time," said Larry. "When the fire gets through with us, there won't be a beakful for any of them."

"They'll find plenty down below," I said. "There's enough carrion down there to gorge them for weeks."

One minute—half a minute more, and the tinder would be ablaze.

Larry and I watched the tip of light, as though in a mesmeric spell. It was a flaming eye, that held us fast. Now it was within three inches of the point of death; now it seemed to leap the space. The feathery stuff blackened, curled, snapped, smoked—and then, a strange thing happened.

A blot of ink seemed to fall upon the spot where our eyes were riveted. The ink blot swayed to and fro, and the new-born fire beneath it died.

"Heaven bless the bird!" cried Larry, with a shout of joy. "We're saved! We're saved!"

One of the wheeling condors had alighted upon the ball of glass. His bulk above the globe cut off the rays of light from the sun. Even had he been as transparent as the glass itself, he would have been our savior still; for his sudden weight had set the ball to swinging like a pendulum upon the copper chain.

"Don't frighten him away," I admonished. "Let us pray that he stays there till the sun moves off the danger point."

"The danger is over, my boy," cried Larry. "It would take fifteen minutes, at least, for the burning glass to swing back to a dead stop. My lad, we're saved—I tell you, we're saved!"

"I'll never kill a condor as long as I live," I cried, as though registering a vow.

"Neither will I, Jack," said Larry. "And now," he added briskly, "we have just twenty-four hours in which to free ourselves from these pesky posts. If we can't do it inside that limit, we ought to be burned. What's more, we will be scorched if we don't; for the sun will come back to that selfsame spot again to-morrow noon, and there's no chance of the dear old bird repeating the performance."

The condor rocked solemnly upon his glass perch for perhaps three minutes, and then, observing that his fellows had swooped down to where lay the wreck of the monastery and its shattered tenants, plunged after them. The glass ball swung ten feet from left to right, and oscillated in lessening arcs for nearly half an hour. When next the piercing rays of the sun fell steadily upon one spot, the deadly point of light dropped harmlessly upon the bare black rock, six feet from the faggots of the sun god's altar.

In the course of two hours, Larry managed to free himself from his stake and chain. By dint of superhuman exertions, he succeeded in pulling up the stake to which he was bound, and then, using the jagged edges of a stone for a file, severed the links of his chain and was free.

Long before Sullivan had accomplished this, Norelle had regained consciousness. When her eyes opened, she gazed around in wonder at the unfamiliar scene. Then she saw Larry and me at our stakes, felt the chains that bound her own wrists, and once more came to a realization of her peril. She missed the presence of her persecutors.

"Where are the monks, and where is the monastery?" she asked, her bewildered eyes taking in the chasm.

"The monks are down there," I said, "and so is their house."

"They have gone to their reward in the sun god's temple—or to some other equally hot place," added Larry.

While Larry tugged at his chains and swore under his breath, as he cut his wrists or bruised his hands in the task of extricating himself, I gave Norelle a brief account of the terrible scenes, which Providence had mercifully hidden from her eyes. When I described how the heroic unknown had battered down the building with his single arm, and had gone to death with the rest, Norelle's face flushed, and her eyes blazed with admiration.

"Glorious — perfectly glorious!" she cried. "What a noble martyr! And have you no idea, Jack, who he was?"

"Not the faintest in the world," I replied.

"Yet he said he loved you in the dead past," said Norelle.

"Yes."

"I know who he was," exclaimed Norelle, "and so do you, if you but think. Who else could he have been, but your——"

"My father!" I cried. "But no—I cannot believe it! Had he been my father, he would surely

have revealed himself to me, for he had ample opportunity to do so."

"He did not do so because he was too noble, too heroic—because he loved you too much," cried Norelle, her face transfigured with the lofty sentiments she expressed. "I can read his mind even now, although he has gone to his reward in heaven."

"I do not see how you figure it out," I exclaimed.

"It is all too plain—too pitifully plain—why he denied himself the joy of a reunion," cried Norelle. He knew that, to save you, he must die. Why, then, should he reveal his identity, even to you? Why should he reopen the scars in your heart and in the heart of your mother—the wounds that time had healed? You both had lived down the sharpest pain, and time had softened your grief. To have made himself known to you would surely have been a cruel thing to do. He, therefore, denied himself, in order to die for you, and leave you no less happy than you were when you came to the monastery. Oh, Jack, now I love you more than ever, for your father's sake. He was a hero, if ever a hero walked abroad on the earth."

When Norelle was released from her chains, she was scarcely able to stand, but she insisted on

helping Larry until I, too, was freed from my galling bonds. She then consented to rest, while Larry and I took stock of the situation.

We were still in desperate straits. How were we to get down alive from that shelf of rock. Above, below, and on either side, the smooth, black face of the cliff stretched away from us, and offered neither hand nor foothold for the most daring climber. Unless we could provide ourselves with wings in some miraculous manner, escape seemed hopeless, and it looked as though we had cheated the funeral pyre only to perish by thirst and hunger.

One hope, and only one, presented itself after we had made a most careful examination of the surroundings. This was the possibility of reaching one of the tunnels bored into the cliff at the place where the monastery had stood. But it looked like a forlorn hope, at the best. There were four of these holes in the face of the mountain, and the nearest of them was at least twenty feet below, and eight or ten feet to one side of, the rock of sacrifice.

Larry set about improvising a ladder to span the space between. He took the several pieces of chain which had been used to fasten us to the stakes, and to hang the glass ball above our heads,

and pieced them carefully, end on end. Then he uttered an exclamation of dismay. When all of them were joined, the total length was too short to reach the tunnel opening. Six feet more of chain were needed. Larry leaned against the back wall of rock and swore softly under his breath.

"I have a suggestion," ventured Norelle. "Why not use the stakes to piece out the chain?"

"Faith, and why not, my girl!" cried Larry joyfully. "Only because I am that stupid that I never think of a good idea till somebody thinks it for me. You're a genius. The thought will save our lives."

While he talked, he worked rapidly upon the suggestion, piecing out the chains with two of the stakes. The third stake—that nearest the tunnel opening—Larry left where it was planted, and fastened firmly to it one end of the lengthened chain.

"Now, see me go down the fire escape to the hole in the wall," he said, deliberately taking off his shirt and tearing it into shreds.

"What on earth are you doing now?" I asked, in astonishment.

"I'm merely trying to save my lily-white hands," he replied. "The chain is none too large,

and would cut me badly when I bore my weight upon it, unless I made some mitts."

Quickly winding the bandages around his hands, Larry approached the side of the rock.

"How on earth are you ever going to get to that tunnel?" I asked, as I looked down into space, and drew back with a shudder.

"Swing," he replied simply.

"I am lighter than you are, and ought to do it," I exclaimed, in a half-hearted way. I knew before I spoke that Larry would not let me make the attempt. I also knew that, if I were to try it, I should surely fail. The fear I had always entertained for great heights would make the attempt a failure and a tragedy.

Larry knew it, too; for he laughed, and said: "I like swinging better than any other sport I know."

Without more ado, he prepared for his dizzy task. As a precautionary measure, I fastened the chain around his waist, and then tested the strength of the post and the several sections of the chain. All seemed strong and true. Larry then crawled slowly backward over the edge of the rock, paying out the chain with his bandaged hands as he went. In another moment, he was lost to view.

"Oh, I do hope the posts and chain will hold!" cried Norelle, her voice a sob.

"Never fear—they'll hold a house," replied Larry's voice, from space.

Norelle and I crouched near the edge of the rock, holding each other's hands, scarcely daring to speak or breathe. I watched the chain running taut from the stake to the edge of the rock, and my heart sank as I thought I saw the links lengthen with the strain. Suppose they were to be severed by the knife-like edge of the stone shelf. Suppose Larry's hands should slip, and the chain around his waist were to give way. A sweat broke out upon my forehead.

"How are you getting on, old man?" I called, after he had been hidden from sight for possibly a minute.

"Fine as silk," came his hearty reply. "I'll be there in about two winks."

"Look, Jack—he's swinging!" cried Norelle, at the next moment.

Sure enough, his lithe body swung into view, then disappeared, then came in sight once more. How he was able to keep his head, as he swept back and forth across the face of the cliff, with that hideous gulf below, was beyond my comprehension. It made me sick to watch him, and I

shut my eyes, lest I should see his body torn from the chain and shot into space like a missile from a sling.

Then I heard a cheery shout, and opened my eyes, to behold the brave fellow standing, safe and sound, in the tunnel's mouth. Then, and not until then, did I feel that we were saved.

In an hour, or less, we had rigged up a rope ladder from the rock of sacrifice to the tunnel opening, and had got Norelle, as well as my own cowardly self, into the cavern. Norelle sank on her knees to utter a prayer of thanksgiving, and Larry and I solemnly shook hands.

CHAPTER XIX

A PROPHECY FULFILLED

WE sat up late, that night, discussing our marvelous escape, and planning a programme for the future.

After descending from the rock of sacrifice, we had made a tour of the caverns from the face of the cliff to the copper mines, and in all those miles of tunnel had found no living human being. The foundry, the kitchen, the tailor and carpenter shops, the cloth mill, the mines, the joinery, and all the other haunts of the monks, were as the industrious workmen had quit them when they had been summoned to participate in the ceremony which ended in their death. Even the fires in the furnaces were burning, and, as Larry thought we might need them on the morrow, when we planned to begin the construction of a new hoist over the chasm, we added more fuel, to keep them ablaze.

"If I had to strike a light with flint and steel, I'd be up against it, sure enough," said Larry.

Norelle went to rest in the cave of repentance, that night, while Larry and I slept upon a shake-down of blankets outside the door.

"Good night, brave gentlemen," she said, before closing the brazen door between us. "If I am haunted by repentant spirits, will you come to my assistance?"

"We sure will," agreed Larry. "Any spirit that bothers you will have good cause to repent."

Shortly after midnight we were awakened by a rumbling and rocking of the earth. As we started to our feet, Larry and I were both thrown violently against the wall of the tunnel, and, sleep dazed as we were, it was some little time before we could collect our senses. The rumbling was so loud and so incessant that it was with the utmost difficulty that we were able to hear each other's voices.

"Where is Norelle?" I asked; then, remembering that she was sleeping in the room beyond the brass door, I knocked upon the metal panels, and shouted her name. In another moment, she opened the door, and came out.

"What is the matter? What caused the earth to shake?" she asked.

"The volcano," replied Larry. "Mont Lazarre is giving us a shaking before taking.

"Let us go to the mouth of the tunnel, and see what is going on," I suggested. "Even though we cannot get down to level ground, it will seem less terrifying to be in sight of the open air."

Losing no time, we hurried down the corridor. Norelle gave a hand to each, and was easily able to keep up with our pace for the entire distance. When we came to the hall of the sacred dead, we found scores of the copper figures lying on the floor. The great copper condor seemed to be imbued with horrible life; for he was swinging erratically from his invisible wires, and, in the dim light cast by a few lamps, which were still burning, acted as though he were flying uncertainly about, in search of something or somebody. The heroic figure of Izaquil was gone from its pedestal.

"Izaquil has fallen," cried Larry, pointing to the prostrate figure of the founder of the brotherhood.

"The prophecy is fulfilled," I exclaimed. "What did the book of history say? 'As long as Izaquil stands, so long will the sun god's worshippers remain in power!'"

"It wasn't necessary for Izaquil to fall to let us know that his priests were out of business," said Larry.

Although the earth's quakings seemed to be lessening in violence, we found great difficulty in making our way to the end of the tunnel. Now and then, we encountered wide fissures in the floor of rock, and, had we not been guided by the rays from the copper lamps, we should surely have been engulfed. At other places, we were obliged to surmount piles of rock, loosened from the roof of the tunnel; and, at still others, we found ridges and hillocks, as high as our heads, which had been heaved up by the subterranean forces.

Mont Lazarre was a splendid, terrifying spectacle. Miles away, though we were, we could easily have read the finest print by the light he cast. At intervals, sheets of flame, hundreds of feet in height, shot upward from his crest, and the detonations from his subterranean explosions sounded like the continuous bombardment of great guns. During the intervals between the displays of flame at the crater's mouth, the belching smoke was tinted with all the colors of the rainbow. At other times, magnificent showers of sparks were hurled into the clouds. To add to the glory of the sight, miles of sparse underbrush and stunted forest, near the summit of the volcano, had caught fire, and now formed a crown of deeper red upon the mountain's top.

Within two hours, the central flames died down, the quakings ceased, and the forest fire had burned itself out against the greener and less inflammable foliage of the lower mountain slopes. But the smoke from the crater still showed red and green and blue, as the chemicals in the great underground furnace were consumed, and the threatening rumblings at the roots of the mountain continued with unabated regularity.

“That was just a small exhibition—a try-out, so to speak,” remarked Larry, as we prepared to turn in for a few hours more of sleep. “One of these fine days, the Old Man of the Mountain will sure get busy, and then look out. When that happens, I want to be well on my way home.”

Early next morning, Larry and I constructed an elevator at the mouth of the tunnel. We found hundreds of feet of chain of various sizes in the monks’ workshop, and, with the great variety of mechanical appliances which the busy artificers had had in use and in stock, we found no difficulty in constructing a “lift” which was quite as serviceable as, and more easily manipulated than, the huge windlass used by the mutes. After we had tested the apparatus carefully with weights, it was ready for use.

We left the caverns forever shortly before noon.

A thorough canvass of the situation, in which all three participated, convinced us that it would be best to move our abode nearer to St. Croix. If we hoped ever to capture Varney, it was imperative that we be near enough to watch his movements, and take advantage of any indiscreet move he might make, that would enable us to get him by strategy.

The fifteen miles that separated the tunnels from the island capital made any systematic watch of his movements from them quite out of the question. Added to this, the earnest wish of Norelle to be nearer her parents, and the fact that all trace of the Voodoo people in the vicinity had disappeared, made our change of base as desirable as it seemed safe.

Before leaving the sun god's caverns, we took the precaution of "blacking up," as Larry and I had done on the memorable night when we rescued the negro boy from the Voodoos. Norelle, I thought, made one of the handsomest mulatto girls I had ever seen, and Larry and I, who dyed our faces a darker hue, would have passed anywhere for Carib plantation hands. Our clothes had become much worn and tattered during the last few days, and only required a little treatment with earth and ashes to render them quite as unpre-

possessing as the garments usually worn by the negroes whom we were counterfeiting.

We made the descent to the ground in safety, after first lowering such articles and implements as we should be likely to need on the journey through the jungle.

What a sight met our eyes when we reached the base of the cliff!

There was the wreck of the great building, and there, in the midst of the riven timbers, with their faces distorted, and their limbs shattered or torn from their trunks, were the dumb monks. On the top of this mass of débris, thrust up between two timbers, was the head of Xaca. Even in death, he seemed to command the brotherhood. His face was calm; his wide-open eyes looked bravely into eternity; and as I regarded that noble countenance for the last time, a great wave of pity and sorrow swept my heart. He had, indeed, cruelly condemned us all to death; but, after all, he had translated the light as it had been given him to see—and who shall say that he had not gone to his reward?

Scrambling over the wreckage was a fighting, screaming flock of condors, and, now and then, we saw the slinking forms of wild dogs, rats, and smaller creatures. The “sacred birds” were

claiming their last meal from the monks.

Sickened with horror, we hastened from the scene, and plunged into the forest.

We had proceeded five miles or more in the direction of St. Croix before we encountered any one. Then we came upon a negro cabin in a little clearing of the jungle, and found that the occupants were about to leave their home. All their household belongings had been loaded upon a cart, and the head of the family was preparing to act as beast of draught between the shafts.

"Where are you going?" asked Larry, in Spanish.

"We are running away from the mountain," replied the man. "We go to Angeles, where my brother, who is rich, has a sailboat. We will go with him to Haiti, for this island is obeah. The Yellow Queen she says it will be all burned up in three days."

"Can't the Yellow Queen save the island?" asked Larry. "Can't she put out the fires in the mountain?"

"She can, but she will not," replied the man. "She is angry with her people, and will punish them."

"Why is she angry?"

"That I do not know," said the man, as he ad-

justed the straps about his shoulders. "But you can see that she is very angry, indeed, by the way the mountain is roaring and the earth is trembling. Make haste and go away from the island, or you, too, will be burned."

As we trudged through the forest and passed by sugar and banana plantations, we came upon many other negroes who were fleeing from the wrath of the queen and the mountain. All seemed to have received Joan of Lazarre's warning in some mysterious way, and all were resolved to place as many miles as possible between themselves and "Father Mountain" before the end of the three days' limit. None of them, however, seemed to have any definite idea of the cause of the queen's anger, although one old woman told us that "strange white folks" had made Gabrielle obeah, or accursed.

Near the outskirts of St. Croix, we found a cabin which seemed to be admirably suited to our purpose. It consisted of three rooms, partly furnished, and had just been vacated by a panic-stricken family of blacks. The old negro who owned it lived next door, in a hut of similar proportions. He was overjoyed at the prospect of finding new tenants so soon after losing the old.

"There's hardly any use in renting the place for

three days," said Larry, to draw the old man out, "for the island will be burned up on Saturday."

"Do not believe it for a moment," cried the old man. "That is all the yellow woman's talk. She is turning the heads of all the people on the island. It is ridiculous. The mountain has been there where it is all my life, and has never destroyed the island yet—has it? And I am an old man, a very old man."

The dimness of our landlord's vision probably prevented him from detecting our make-up. At any rate, he gave no sign to indicate that he doubted our color, and did all in his power to make us comfortable in our new home. When he left us, to return to his little cottage on the other side of the whitewashed fence, he begged us to call upon him if we stood in need of anything; he would gladly do for us all that he would have done for his own children.

All that night, our sleep was disturbed by the rumbling of the mountain, and when I arose to look out of the window, upon two or three occasions, I found the landscape bathed in light from the fires of the volcano.

CHAPTER XX

THE CABINET STANDS UP

EARLY on the following morning, we went to St. Croix. There were many negroes hurrying back and forth along the roads, and our appearance attracted no attention. Indeed, the scared faces of those we met, white as well as black, showed that they had no thoughts for anything but their own personal safety.

The volcano was the one topic of conversation. Business was suspended in the town. Knots of people were gathered on the street corners and in front of the *Heraldo*—the principal newspaper of the city—and mounted soldiers were galloping up and down the streets, waving their sabres and shouting commands.

The governor-general, it seemed, had issued orders prohibiting the assembling of more than ten persons in one place in the city, and it was to compel obedience to this manifesto that the cavalry was engaged.

As we proceeded toward the Hotel Madrid, we learned that the people of the town had held a mass meeting, the night before, in the plaza, almost under the windows of the governor-general's palace, and had demanded that Sagastor seize the foreign ships in the harbor and convert them into ferryboats, for the use of the citizens who wished to flee to Haiti, in order to escape the volcano.

The governor-general had not only refused to accede to this demand, but had sent his cavalry to disperse the meeting. Several men and one woman had been killed in the riot that followed, and on every hand we now heard curses and threats for the "upstart governor," mingled with the cries of terror on the lips of those who were fleeing from the volcanic fires.

When we neared the harbor, we observed an unusual number of vessels. There were war ships from Spain and Italy, merchant craft from England and Germany, and, to our surprise and joy, an ironclad, flying the Stars and Stripes.

"It must be the *Texas*," said Larry as he shaded his eyes to look out on the bay. "General Pierson's request has been finally granted by the department."

The glad reunion which took place at the hotel

that day, may be better imagined than described. But it required some manœuvring for us to secure an audience with either the consul or his wife on account of our disguises. Norelle was finally admitted, however, on the plea that she had been engaged as maid to the American consul's wife. The general himself then came out, and invited the two counterfeit negroes into his office. It was, indeed, fortunate that we had not attempted to return in our own proper characters; for we learned that the governor-general had had the hotel under constant surveillance ever since our departure.

After Mrs. Pierson had shed a few tears of joy, and the first rapid fire of questions had been answered on both sides, we learned that Billings and Hollis had returned to the States on the last regular steamer. The general had paid the captain the amount of fare agreed upon by Larry and myself when we set out from New Orleans, and had added to that amount a sum, which he would not divulge, to recompense Billings for the loss of the *Foam*.

"I felt that I owed Captain Billings more than my entire bank account," said General Pierson. "Had it not been for him and his little steamer, you boys would not have come to the island, and

we should, in all probability, have fallen victims of the Voodoos."

Both Larry and I protested strenuously against the idea of the general paying our fare from the States, and demanded to know just how much he had given Billings. But General Pierson was quite stubborn about the matter, and not only refused pointblank to tell us what he had paid, but became irritated when we pressed the subject.

"You are my guests," he exclaimed, "and, as such, have no right whatever to ask what I have expended for you. The beggarly sum I paid the good captain was altogether too small to mention, so please dismiss the subject. I pride myself, gentlemen, on belonging to that older school, of which Lincoln was such a fine example, which valued friendship and worth, honor and hospitality, above filthy lucre."

"If you take a cent from them, general, I shall be grievously disappointed," said Mrs. Pierson, who had overheard the argument. "Remember that we of the South value hospitality above almost everything else. These gentlemen are our guests, as you have said, my dear, and it is a fine state of affairs if we cannot pay the little bill, without causing such a great to-do. If you say

another word, both the general and myself will be highly insulted."

We compromised on an agreement that the consul should tell us the sum he had paid, and accept reimbursement in the event of our catching Varney and collecting the reward offered for his return.

"Now that that is all settled," said Larry, "suppose you and I, Jack, go and get the crook."

"Suppose that we go out and stop the volcano," I retorted, never dreaming that he was in earnest.

"Do you mean to say that you are not willing to take him?" asked Larry, quite seriously.

"I'd give a year of my life to get him," I exclaimed. "I'm with you in any game you want to play."

"Then come along," commanded the detective. "We can't get him here."

We made our adieux to the Piersons, promising to return in the evening, and proceeded to the street. On the way out of the hotel, Sullivan unfolded his plan.

"What do you think of it?" he asked, as he concluded.

"I think it is a wonder," I exclaimed. "It is a stroke of genius, an inspiration, and I can offer only one objection."

"What is that?"

"It won't work."

"It's got to work," he cried. "We'll make it work. If it doesn't, you and I will figure as principals in a garrotting party in the governor-general's palace yard about sun-up to-morrow. Of course, if you're afraid, I'll let you out of it."

"And try something safer?" I asked hopefully.

"I'll try nothing else," he replied, with the ring of grit and determination which I had learned to know so well. "I'm going in alone, if you won't come with me."

"I'm with you to the death, old man," I exclaimed, flushing with shame at the thought of deserting him. "It wasn't because I was afraid—it was because I feared the plan wouldn't work, and we should be prevented from adopting some plan that would."

"This offers the biggest results in the quickest time, and I've studied out a thousand schemes," said Larry. "I knew you wouldn't get cold feet at the end of the game. Now, the first thing for us to do is to get a change of clothes."

We removed a portion of our burnt cork at the waterside, and then visited a second-hand clothing shop, where we bought a couple of Spanish infantry lieutenants' uniforms, explaining to the

proprietor that we had been out on a spree and had been robbed of our own. As we gave the man twice as much as the uniforms were worth, he did not evince any unpleasant inquisitiveness, and, after a more thorough cleansing of our faces and hands in his shop, we emerged, looking quite military and respectable.

Our next objective point was the harbor master's office, where, with the assistance of a gold piece, we managed to gain an immediate audience with the official, and, with fifty more of the same coins, persuaded him to agree to the proposal we came to make. This was to change the relative positions in the harbor of the American war ship *Texas*, and the Spanish man-of-war, *Christobel*—the change to be made immediately after dark.

At the time when we were negotiating with the harbor master, the *Texas* was lying a mile or so off the wharf, and the *Christobel* was within a cable length of the dock at the foot of Concepcion Street, the principal thoroughfare leading from the governor-general's palace to the sea.

Larry gave as an explanation, his wish to bring the *Texas* nearer shore, because his inamorata was going aboard that evening, and he wished to spare her the discomfort of an uncomfortable trip in a small boat. No harm would be done by ef-

fecting the change, and, if any objection were made, the harbor master could order them back again on the morrow. The astute official pocketed the two hundred and fifty dollars which Larry had placed in his hands, winked wisely, and gave us his sacred word of honor that he would carry out our wishes.

"It's a ten-to-one bet that he disappoints us," remarked Larry, as we left the place, "but it was the only thing to do. Even should he go back on his word, we'll be able to manage, if the rest of our programme goes through right."

It was then necessary for us to wait for darkness, before taking the next step, and we put in the intervening time lounging about the vicinity of the plaza. Fortune was kind to us, for we soon fell in with a half-drunken Spanish captain, who was attached to the governor-general's staff.

Sagastor, he confided to us, had just kicked him out of his presence, but he would have his revenge—for was he not of a far better family than the upstart governor-general? Was his blood not of the finest and purest Castilian? And the governor-general—the Lord only knew from what hog pen he had sprung! Besides that, Sagastor was an arrant coward, and he would expose him as such. Was he not preparing, even at that very

moment, to flee the country? That was why he kept the *Christobel* in the harbor, instead of sending it to Cuba, where it was needed to overawe the miserable revolutionists! He put on a brave front before the people, did this upstart Sagastor, but he was really quaking inside of his gold lace from fear of the volcano.

He denounced the prophecy of the Yellow Queen as rot, fit only to frighten children and old women; nevertheless, he believed every word she uttered, and was preparing to get away from the danger as fast as his chicken-livered soul would let him. And it was this creature—this renegade, rich pig-head—this scum of the earth—that had dared to kick him out of the apartment, and hold him up to the ridicule of his fellows!

The least he could do to preserve his honor, stormed our acquaintance, was to have the governor-general's blood for it, and he would challenge him to mortal combat. Then he concluded his recital by weeping copiously and drinking another bottle of wine, at our expense.

By the time our tipsy friend had emptied one more bottle, he had given us the password for the outer gate of the palace, and had confided to us the fact that Sagastor was to meet the members of his cabinet at nine o'clock that evening, to con-

sider the wording of a proclamation which would placate the populace. The governor-general himself, the officer said, intended to go aboard the *Christobel* early in the morning, ostensibly for a visit to Cuba. But he knew—trust a Castilian captain to know!—that, when he was once safely on the ship, he would stay aboard until she dropped anchor in the harbor of Madrid. Sagastor's valuables, the captain said, were to be taken on board the war ship that evening.

When we had advanced thus far into the officer's confidence, Larry suggested that we secure a private dining room, in which to continue the discussion. The captain agreed to this, all the more readily when Larry said that he would assist him in the preparation of the challenge to be sent to the insulting Sagastor.

Ten minutes after we had entered the more private quarters, the Spanish officer was in a state of somnolence, and Larry had changed uniforms with him. We left him stretched out on the table, and gave the waiter a silver piece, with instructions to keep him locked safely in the room until he was sober.

"By that time," said Larry, as we hurried out of the restaurant, "we shall have avenged the captain's dear honor for him."

It was now growing dark, and we visited a livery stable, where we hired a closed carriage. At the same place we rented a coachman's hat and cloak, Sullivan explaining to the man in charge that he wished me, his orderly, to drive for him that evening.

I put on the coachman's clothes, mounted the box, and, with Larry inside the coach, drove to a corner of the street, within half a square of the governor-general's palace. Larry then bought a piece of rope at a near-by store; I changed back to the lieutenant's uniform, concealing the hat and cloak within the carriage, and we were ready for our adventure.

We waited until ten minutes after the palace clock had counted nine, then walked boldly up the palace steps, gave the countersign to the guard, and proceeded to the governor-general's cabinet chamber. Larry carried the rope wrapped up in paper, under his arm.

The upper hall was deserted, save for a solitary soldier, standing guard outside the door of the governor-general's office. As we approached, the man rather sleepily presented his rifle, and said:

"His excellency is closeted with the cabinet, and cannot be disturbed."

"Oh, he'll see us," exclaimed Larry. "Won't you take in our cards?"

"Impossible, señors," replied the soldier, lowering his weapon slightly. "You must wait until to-morrow."

"But you will be good enough to show him our cards immediately after the meeting, won't you?" asked Sullivan, fumbling in the breast of his coat, as though for a card.

"Certainly, captain," agreed the guard, dropping the butt of his gun to the floor, and stretching forth his hand for the card.

"Here it is." As he spoke, Larry's revolver came like a flash from the inside of his coat, and was pressed against the soldier's throat.

"One word, and you die, sir," continued Sullivan, without raising his voice above a low conversational tone. "Jack, take a piece of the rope and tie him."

It required no more than two minutes for me to bind the guard, hand and foot. Then Larry placed a gag in his mouth, and rolled him, face down, in the corner of the hall.

"If you utter a sound, or attempt to roll over, I will kill you instantly," said Larry. "If you remain quiet, you may live."

"Now for Varney," said Sullivan, tiptoeing toward the cabinet chamber. "Get out your guns, and cover the crowd, as soon as the door opens."

Before entering, Larry deftly made a running noose at the end of the rope, of which there was some twenty feet remaining, after the guard was bound, and hung it in the crook of his elbow.

Then he opened the door softly, and walked in. I followed noiselessly at his heels. Our four revolvers immediately covered the little party of men within the room.

Varney was at the far end of a long table, facing the door. Five other men were seated at the table, two on a side, and one at the end nearest us.

"Hands up, gentlemen, or we'll make vacancies in every cabinet place!" said Larry, in sharp incisive tones.

The governor-general's five counsellors gave one frightened look at the revolvers pointing into the room, and, instantly, ten hands were stretched toward the ceiling. Varney was the only one who failed to obey. He half arose from his seat, with a snarl like that of a wild beast.

"Sit down, Varney!" ordered Larry, with a ring of menace in his voice. "We've come for you, my man, and it's up to you whether you go back alive or nailed up in a box."

Varney collapsed in his chair, and his face grew green.

"Now, gentlemen," continued Sullivan to the cabinet members, who were still holding their hands aloft, "you will all of you please march to the rear of the room, behind Mr. Varney, alias Sagastor, face the wall, and still hold your hands as high above your heads as you know how. The first man that drops his arms will get a bullet in the back of his head."

The order was obeyed almost as quickly as it was issued. The five men arose to their feet, hurried to the end of the room, faced the wall, and pressed their hands against the tapestry.

"Now, Jack, tie that crook's hands behind his back," said Larry, "and don't mind it if you hurt him some."

I knotted the rope around Varney's wrists behind his coat, and then, with a loop about his throat, jerked his hands almost up to the nape of his neck.

"That's a good, workman-like job," said Larry approvingly. "And now, as soon as we close his mouth and put some blinders on him, he'll be ready to travel."

"I'll have your lives for this!" hissed the prisoner.

"Shut up!" exclaimed Larry. "You'll be lucky if you keep your own life."

Varney made no more remarks, for in another moment he was gagged and hoodwinked. For the latter purpose, Sullivan appropriated an ornamental table cover, wrapping the cloth loosely around the embezzler's head, and tying it under the chin.

"It reminds me of a black cap," remarked Larry, "and I'm sorry that it isn't one."

"Don't smother him," I urged. "Are you sure he can get air?"

"I'd just a little rather shut off his wind than not," retorted the detective; but I noticed that he assured himself that our prisoner was given all the air he needed.

"We are now going to leave you, gentlemen," said Larry, in a louder tone, to the members of the cabinet, who were still facing the wall, with their hands upraised. "I forbid you to stir hand or foot or head for fifteen minutes. At the end of fifteen minutes, you may lower your hands; and fifteen minutes later you may leave the room, and go to your homes. But, as you value your lives, do not stir out of this chamber inside of half an hour. It is now just half-past nine. Do you understand?"

"Oh, perfectly, señor!"

"We will not move a muscle, señor!"

"We will obey the señor with fidelity!"

These exclamations, and others of like import, came from the five gentlemen facing the wall.

Larry seized Varney by the coat collar, jerked him roughly to his feet, and marched him out of the room.

"Understand one thing before we start," said Sullivan, addressing the head muffled in the tablecloth. "If there is any attempt at rescue, or if we have any trouble whatever getting away from here, I'll put a bullet through your ear as soon as the fun begins. Now—march!" He pressed the barrel of his revolver against the prisoner's head, to emphasize the remark.

Varney made some unintelligible reply, but nodded his head to indicate that he understood.

"Better lock the door, and take the key with you," advised Sullivan, as we passed out into the hall. I did as he directed, and we proceeded along the corridor, past the guard, who still lay trussed like a chicken in the angle of the wall and floor, and down the broad stairway to the front entrance.

"This is his excellency's prisoner," said Larry, to the outer guard.

The soldier betrayed his amazement at sight of the strange figure, muffled in the tablecloth, but

did not offer to detain us. Had he known now near death he was at that moment, his face might have expressed some emotion other than surprise.

It required no more than three minutes' time to walk Varney to the carriage down at the corner, and for me to don my coachman's hat and cloak, and mount the box.

Larry pushed the prisoner into the vehicle, and then climbed in after him. "Drive six or seven blocks north, and then east a few, before going to the wharf," he said, as he slammed the carriage door.

How I contrived to hold the reins, in my excitement, it would be hard for me to tell. The horse, in obedience to lines and whip, broke into a deliberate trot, and we were soon out of sight of the palace. There was no sign of excitement about the mansion to indicate that our bold move had been discovered, and I concluded that the five gentlemen of the cabinet were still obeying instructions, with their hands upraised against the wall.

We evidently had nothing to fear after we left the immediate vicinity of the palace, for the people of the city were overwhelmed with terror. The rumbling mountain to the north was again waving his flags of flame in the sky, and the name

of the Yellow Queen was on every tongue. Had the populace known that we had the governor-general in the carriage, I am certain that none would have attempted a rescue. He was too cordially disliked for any of them to interest themselves in his behalf; and, besides that, the problem of escaping from the volcano was now the only one that stirred the citizens.

We finally reached the wharf, after a round-about tour of the streets, and, hiring a boatman, loaded in our prisoner, and rowed with him to the *Texas*. The bribe-taking official had kept his word, and we found the great white battle ship where the darker Spanish man-of-war had been.

"I have an American prisoner," announced Larry to the officer of the day, who came to scrutinize us over the rail. "May I take him on board."

"By whose order or request?" asked the officer.

"By the order of the United States consul, General Pierson, and by the orders of half the police chiefs in the States," cried Larry boldly.

"The consul's orders are sufficient," replied the officer. "You may come aboard, sir."

When we had climbed the ladder and had seen Varney safely in irons, Larry and I were escorted to the captain's cabin, where that officer put us

through a cross-examination. He was at first inclined to think that he would be running counter to some naval regulation, if he should take charge of Varney without the personal or written orders of the consul. We finally persuaded him to hold the embezzler, however, until we could fetch General Pierson aboard to vouch for the extradition of the prisoner.

"We expect a distinguished visitor aboard ship this evening," said Captain Mayhew, at the conclusion of our interview.

"Who is he?" asked Sullivan.

"His excellency, Governor-General Sagastor," replied the captain proudly. "He has already sent his luggage on board, and we expect him to follow it early in the morning."

"You were not expecting him, were you?" said Sullivan, with a wink in my direction.

"Not at all," admitted the captain. "In fact, it is an entire surprise. But we will feel honored to entertain him, nevertheless."

"The consul has already let me into the secret," said Larry, "and I think, captain, that you may count on entertaining his excellency during the homeward trip. He is going back with you to the United States."

CHAPTER XXI

THE YELLOW QUEEN'S LAST JOKE

LARRY and I hastened with the carriage to the Hotel Madrid, intending to fetch the general to the wharf and to the *Texas*. A shower of cinders from Mont Lazarre was falling, and, at times, the scorching atoms so blinded me that I could scarcely pick out the road.

The streets were filled with hurrying men and women, whose pallid faces showed greenish white in the weird illumination made by the volcano. Now and then, our carriage rattled past a group of kneeling figures or singing religionists; while everywhere babies were crying, and little children were wandering about the streets, screaming for lost parents. Many of the people whom we met were bent double with burdens of household goods, which they were carrying Heaven knows whither; while here and there we heard the sound of breaking glass, and saw skulking figures, which proclaimed the presence of thieves even in the shadow of death itself.

Leaving the carriage, we hurried up to the hotel, and ran into the arms of General Pierson.

"Have you seen her?" he cried, as soon as he caught sight of us.

"Seen whom?" I asked; and then, as an icy hand seemed to clutch my heart, I added: "Norelle?"

"Yes—Norelle," continued the old man, in anguished tones. "She has disappeared."

"When? From where?" we asked, in a breath.

"From the hotel—only a few minutes ago," cried the general. "She was in her apartment, preparing to retire for the night; for she was all worn out from excitement and fatigue, and we advised her to go to bed early. Her mother and I were in the room adjoining hers, and heard her scream. Simultaneously with her cry, we both heard the barking of a dog."

Larry and I exchanged horrified glances, as the old man stopped, put his handkerchief to his eyes, and sobbed like a child.

"And you ran into the room, and——" I began.

"And she was not there." General Pierson completed the sentence for me.

"It was the Yellow Queen's messenger—the dog-man?" said Larry, in a scarcely audible voice.

"How had they gone?" I asked. "Out of the door, or the window?"

"The window," replied the general, "for the door was locked."

"How high is the window from the nearest roof?" I asked. "Your apartments are on the third floor, and he certainly could not have carried her with him from that height, even though he possessed the strength of a giant."

"There is a two-story building immediately in the rear of the hotel, and under Norelle's window," explained the general. "Beyond that is a one-story shed. Oh, what a fool I was, not to take warning, and protect my little girl when I knew she was in danger! I am that poor child's murderer, just as surely as though I had taken a dagger and plunged it into her dear heart with these useless old hands! It will kill her mother—I know it will kill her. The poor woman is even now lying in a faint upstairs." As he concluded his recital, the general again buried his face in his hands, and his form shook with sobs.

"You go right upstairs, and revive Mrs. Pierson," commanded Larry, in a resolute, hopeful tone. "Do not give up hope until you find that hope is gone. Jack and I will find the little girl, we promise you; for we know just where to find her."

"She is gone—she is dead before now!" sobbed the old man.

"She is not dead, I tell you," cried Larry, in a tone half of anger and half of command. "Now, you go upstairs at once, and cheer the mother as best you can. We will bring your daughter back to you bright and early in the morning. Now, listen to what I have to say. The island is doomed. Our only chance of escape is on board the *Texas*. Take Mrs. Pierson to the ship at daylight. We will rejoin you there as early as possible. Varney is already on board, and in irons. Will tell you all about his capture when we have more time. Tell Captain Mayhew to have steam up and be ready to leave as soon as we join you. Do you understand and remember it all?"

The general forgot his grief in the effort to assimilate the various facts and directions, and Larry and I raced out of the hotel, and made for the nearest livery stable. There was not a person about the stable when we reached it, but we found four horses in the stalls. Without wasting precious time in a search for the proprietor, we picked out the best-looking pair, saddled them as fast as we could, mounted, and rode northward in the direction of the blazing mountain.

"To the cave?" I asked.

"Sure," replied Larry. "That's where the Yellow Queen is, and that's where your girl will be taken by the dog-man."

How we covered those terrible miles, and lived to reach the end, is a miracle in my eyes. The air was like a furnace; the cinders fell in a blistering hail; the earth yawned, and from the fissures belched poisonous fumes, which burst into flame. The roar of subterranean guns grew louder and louder; and at times the whole mountain slope up which we toiled rocked like a ship in a gale.

But still we pressed doggedly on, always facing and nearing the crater. At some time before dawn, we reached our goal; and, as we came to the mouth of the cave where we had dined that night with the Yellow Queen, we threw ourselves from the backs of our exhausted horses, drew our revolvers, and rushed into the cavern, anticipating a battle.

Joan of Lazzarre was in the cave, with Papaloi and Mamanloi on either hand; but we looked in vain for the dog-man and his girlish victim. The yellow torches, smoking from crevices of the walls, revealed many faces and figures; but all were black, and none resembled the misshapen messenger of evil.

"Come in, Fair Hair and Red Head," said the

Yellow Queen, with a shrill laugh, as we paused irresolutely, after making our sensational entrance, "and shoot, if you wish. Did you come to kill me?"

"Where is Miss Pierson? Where is your horrible dog-man?" I cried.

"They are together," she replied. "When Joan of Lazarre gives the word, your little pale-faced flower, with all her sweetness, all her beauty, will be his."

"Your life shall pay the penalty for this horror!" I cried, pointing my revolver at the woman's face.

"Shoot, Fair Hair," she shrilled, with another laugh. "Shoot, and hasten the hour of that happy marriage. I knew you would come to see me as soon as you discovered that your little bird had left her cage. I knew you would come with your partner, Red Head, and I knew you would draw your pistol, and make brave threats. So I arranged to have the dog-man and his bride safely hidden away, and left orders that, if Joan was injured or killed, the marriage should be celebrated at once. After the wedding, as soon as the dog-man tires of his little wife, he will throw her into the crater of Father Mountain. How do you like the programme, Fair Hair?"

"You are a monster—a devil!" I cried, tears of rage and grief starting to my eyes, as the fiendish woman pictured the fate of my love. "What are your terms for her release? How much money do you want for the white girl?"

"Money?" she screamed. "What does Joan of Lazarre want with money? If she had wanted gold, she might have had all there was in Gabrielle, years ago. She wants happiness. Will money buy that? She wants love. Will money buy that? She wants you, Fair Hair. Will money buy you?"

"Do you think I could love you after what you have done—after what you are doing to-night?" I cried. "Do you think I could ever have any feeling in my heart for you, except loathing, and disgust, and hate, after the way you have plotted to destroy the one girl in all the world that I do love?"

"Yes, you would love me," she replied, arising from her seat, and coming toward me with the sinuous tread of a panther. "You would love me, even though Father Mountain was covering us with a blanket of molten lava as your arms were thrown about me, and your lips met mine."

Her terrible black eyes read me through and through. As I gazed, spellbound, into their fathomless depths, I forgot Norelle, forgot Larry

at my side, forgot the thundering of the mountain, the awful heat from the underground furnaces—forgot my soul.

“You will be the mate of Joan of Lazzarre,” she continued, sinking her voice almost to a whisper. “You will be her king, and rule over an empire of the southern seas. You will put aside the pale-faced girl, and forget that you ever knew her. You will be Joan’s, and Joan’s only.”

“Yes—but you will send the girl home in safety,” I replied.

The words were my words, but I seemed to be some one else. I could see nothing but those marvelous eyes, could hear nothing but that wonderful voice; I was a bird in the spell of a serpent.

“The white girl shall go home in safety,” announced the queen, throwing her snakelike arms around my neck as she spoke. “Fair Hair and Joan shall rule the mountain and the island. Go get the dog-man and his little prisoner, and send her home with Red Head.” She addressed the last words to some of the negroes in the cave, and several of them hurried to the entrance, in obedience to the command.

“And the sooner we get started, the better,” exclaimed Larry. “It sure is getting hot in this place.”

The blacks who had left the cave now returned, and with them were the hideous monster and his prisoner. I scarcely recognized the poor girl, so pale and wan she was. As she tottered into the cavern, and her eyes rested upon Larry and me, she uttered a scream of joy.

"I knew you would come for me, Jack," she cried. "I knew you would come to get me. Oh, dearest, I have had such a terrible experience! You will never know how I have suffered."

"You are to go home at once," exclaimed the queen harshly. "Make haste, before Father Mountain, in his anger, shall burn you up."

"Oh, I am so glad!" breathed Norelle. "Let us go. Let us end this horrible nightmare, and leave the dreadful island as soon as possible."

"The horses are at the door," said Larry, taking Norelle by the arm, and moving with her toward the entrance.

I remained standing where I was, and felt as though I were in a dream. I seemed to have lost all power of motion, and the prospect of losing Norelle forever did not touch my heart in the least. Neither did I feel the suffocating heat that was now coming from the groaning earth, or mind the sulphurous gases that were clutching at my lungs.

"Hurry, dear Jack! We must make haste," cried Norelle.

"I am not going," I said slowly, speaking as one in a trance. "I will stay on the mountain."

"Not going?" she echoed, in tones of amazement and horror. "What do you mean, Jack? What ails you? Larry, tell me what is the matter with Jack. He acts so queerly!"

Norelle turned from me to Sullivan, with a look of terrified inquiry.

"I will stay on the mountain." I repeated the words like a parrot. I felt the will of the Yellow Queen dictating to me through the stifling atmosphere.

"He'll follow us down the mountain after a while," said Larry, making an attempt to set her mind at rest. "He has orders to stay here until you get safely home."

Intuitively, Norelle grasped the terrible meaning of the situation. "You are to remain as a hostage. Your life is the price of mine!" she cried, in sharp notes of agony. "If that is so, we shall die together, Jack. If you stay, I stay. No power shall tear us apart, after all we have suffered together."

As she spoke, she released Sullivan's arm, and, walking back into the cave, seated herself upon

a block of stone, and calmly folded her arms.

"You have not long to wait," cried the queen sharply. "The boiling lava is now mounting to the edge of the bowl. In a few minutes, it will overflow, and go rolling down the sides of the mountain, to destroy every living thing in its path."

"Then it will find me here, unless Jack goes with me," replied Norelle, in resolute tones. "If he must die, he shall not die alone."

Suddenly, the Yellow Queen burst into a shrill laugh. "Run home, my children!" she cried, with another burst of uncanny merriment. "Run home, my dears, and, as you go, laugh a little at the joke played by Joan of Lazzarre. I thought I'd amuse you here on the mountain, while the sparks were flying up above, and the drums were beating down below. But now the joke is played, and you had better hasten home, if you ever hope to laugh again."

"Then we may go!" I cried, seeming to regain my senses, as she withdrew from me the compelling force of her eyes and will. "Is it true that you do not want me to stay?"

"It was all a joke—a merry joke," she shrilled, urging us toward the entrance. "Think sometimes of Joan, and laugh—laugh—laugh."

We gained the entrance, where the horses were standing.

"But you will come with us, will you not, and save your life?" I asked, as I placed Norelle upon my horse, and prepared to run beside her, with my hand upon the saddlebow. Larry mounted his horse, and headed him down the incline.

"My father wants me," said the Yellow Queen, gazing into my eyes with a look of yearning which I could not mistake. "My father wants me, and I will go to him."

"But you may come with us," cried Norelle, her heart touched by the despair in Joan's eyes, though she did not know the cause. "We are to leave the island at once, and will be safe from the terrible volcano. Come with us to the blessed land where there are no mountains spouting fire."

"And what would I do there?" asked the Yellow Queen sadly. "What, but watch your happiness? No—Joan's place is here. The great spirit of the mountain, which she has commanded for so many years, now commands her to come—and she obeys. Farewell, Fair Hair! Farewell, Red Head!"

For a moment she stood in the falling cinders, with the gray light of the smoke-filled dawn shining in her eyes. Then, suddenly, she turned her

face to the north, and ran like a chamois up the steep trail toward the crater.

We stood transfixed for a moment, and then Larry started his horse up the precipitous path in pursuit. But it was little more than an impulse; for the horse stumbled, slid, and came to a stop before he had gone fifty feet.

But another took the rough trail—one who could climb as well as Joan of Lazzarre.

A dark form shot out of the tunnel's mouth, and went up over rock and vine, over log and ditch, on all fours. We wondered what the hideous creature was about. Nor had we long to wait before we knew.

Joan reached the crest of awful heat. We saw her pause, saw her throw up her hands, and thought we heard her cry. Then she disappeared over the brink, and we knew that she had thrown herself into the arms of Father Mountain.

Half a minute later, we saw the hairy monster scale the rock which formed the lip of the bowl, and vanish. He had gone to do her bidding in death, faithful as he had been in life.

No time was to be wasted. Down the steep path we plunged, at the imminent risk of life and neck; but we knew that our very lives depended on the speed we made. The poisonous

gases thrown out by the crater and by the widening fissures in the earth almost suffocated us at times. Often, we had to make wide detours to escape a yawning chasm; more than once, the rocking of the earth threw the horses from their feet, and dashed their riders to the ground. But on we raced, and nearer grew the housetops of St. Croix.

Larry and I took turns at riding and running, and we managed to make the journey in better time, and with less fatigue, than I had dreaded at the start.

When we had made half the journey, we happened to look back at the mountain, and were horrified to see that it had changed its form. Its cap was gone—melted away—and down from the rumbling edges gushed a dull red flood, which wiped out tree and rock as it made toward the sea.

“The lava—the lava!” yelled Larry. “And it’s going faster than we are. We’ll be lucky if we beat it to the wharf.”

But we had ample time to spare; for, after the fiery torrent had rolled a few miles, its cooling surface slackened pace.

Never shall I forget the terrible scenes in the city, as we hurried through the streets. Mobs

were surging this way and that, without purpose and without hope. Children were lying where they had been trampled under foot—some crippled, some dead. Shops were broken open, and their contents scattered on the pavements; and everywhere, and all the time, the sound of piteous wailing rent the air.

Two men tried to rob us of our horses as we neared the dock, and might have succeeded, had we not gone armed. Before they would abandon their purpose, Larry and I were obliged to fell them both with the butts of our revolvers.

As we hurried down the levee, we heard a shout, and saw a small boat from the *Texas* lying not more than fifty feet offshore. General Pierson was in the bow; and, as soon as he saw us, he stood up, and yelled for very joy.

The boat drew up to the wharf, and we got in, leaving our faithful horses to find their way home—if, indeed, there was any home for them to reach. Just as we pushed off, several men leaped from the dock, and swam for the boat. Two of them managed to reach the side, and, seizing the gunwale, would have swamped us, had not the sailors beaten them off with their oars.

Their fear-maddened faces, as they sank into the bay, have haunted me for years.

"What about our prisoner?" asked Larry of the general, after Norelle had assured him that she was none the worse for her terrible journey to the mountain.

"Still safely in irons, but defiant," replied the consul.

"Defiant, is he?" cried Larry. "It's small excuse he's got for being uppish, after what he's done."

"He says that you may have him, but you can whistle for the money," continued General Pier-son.

"Oh!" Is that a fact?" chuckled the detective. "And won't he be after giving you any clue as to the present whereabouts of that boodle?"

"No," replied the consul, "but he claims it is safe."

"He never was righter in all his life," exclaimed Sullivan, "for it is sure enough safe—safe on board the *Texas*, where he obligingly sent it last night, thinking that he was putting it aboard the Spaniard. I guess we've made a pretty good clean-up of the Planters' Bank case—eh, Jack?"

"It looks pretty good to me," I admitted.

"You could never guess, Norelle, who is on board the *Texas*," said the general, as we neared the gray side of the battle ship.

"Never in the world. The President of the United States?"

"Doctor Strong," said the consul smilingly.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" she cried. "Oh, Jack, dear, aren't you glad that Doctor Strong is safe?"

"Of course I am—tremendously glad," I replied; but there was a feeling in my heart which made me rather doubt the sincerity of my words.

Half an hour later, Norelle, Larry, and I were leaning against the stern rail of the *Texas*, watching the harbor of St. Croix recede in the distance. Mont Lazarre was spouting flame and smoke like a blast furnace; the hail of cinders, even at that distance, was scorching hot; and the atmosphere was like an oven.

When we had steamed about ten miles, a deafening explosion occurred on the island.

"Look—oh, look!" cried Norelle. "Mont Lazarre is splitting in two."

Even as she spoke, the mountain parted, and a gulf—a mile wide, and of measureless depth—was made in the land from north to south. The city of St. Croix fell into the abyss. Its buildings, streets, and parks vanished like the dissolving views upon a screen.

The island of Gabrielle was gone.

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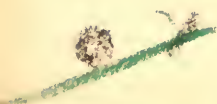
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